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PRESENT LESSONS
FROM
DISTANT DAYS

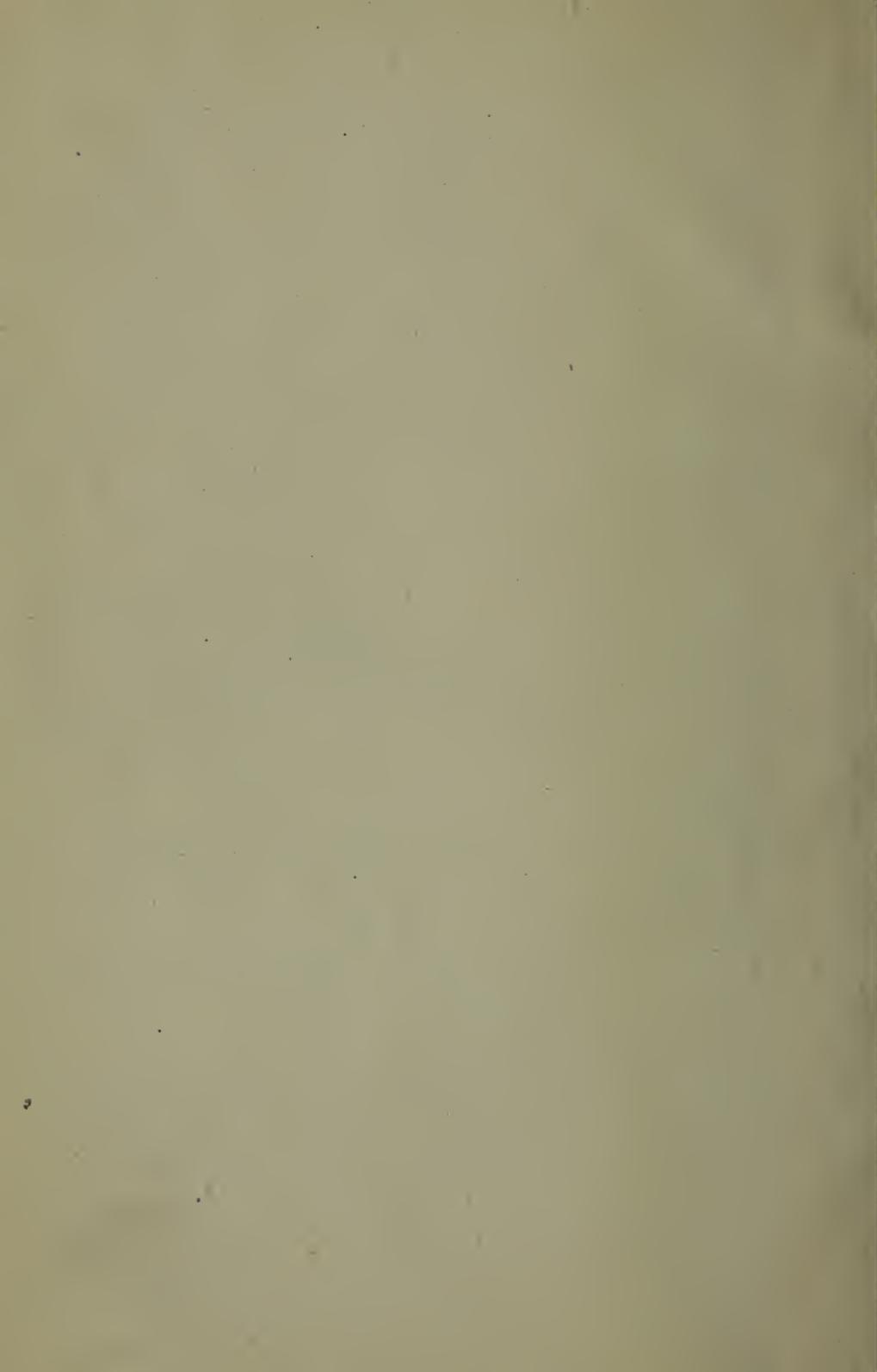


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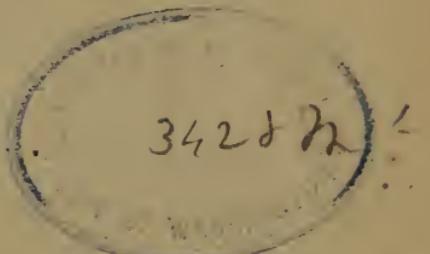
FROM

DISTANT DAYS.

BY

WAYLAND HOYT, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "HINTS AND HELPS FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE."



NEW YORK:
WARD & DRUMMOND,
SUCCESSORS TO U. D. WARD,
116 NASSAU STREET.

(1881)
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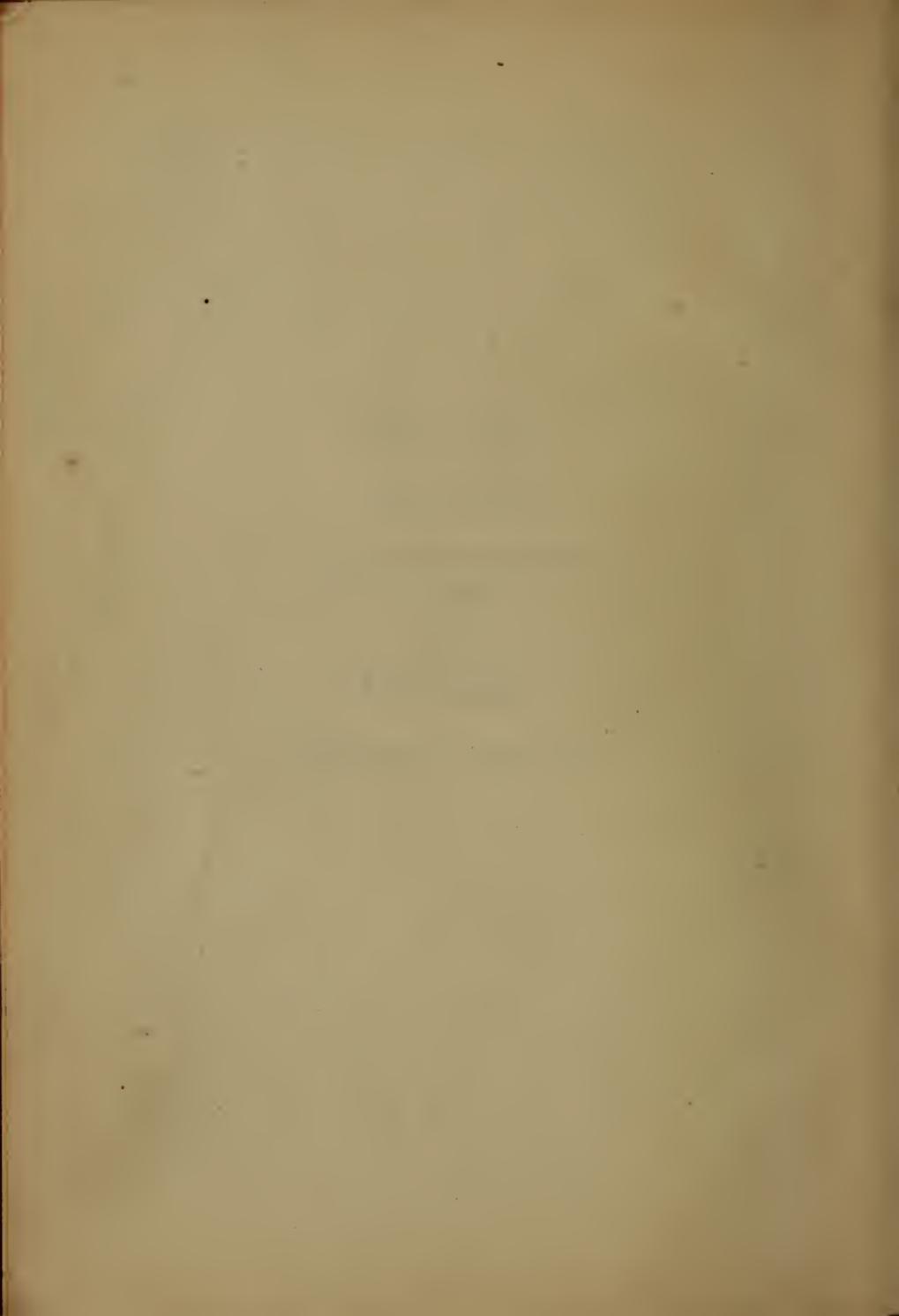
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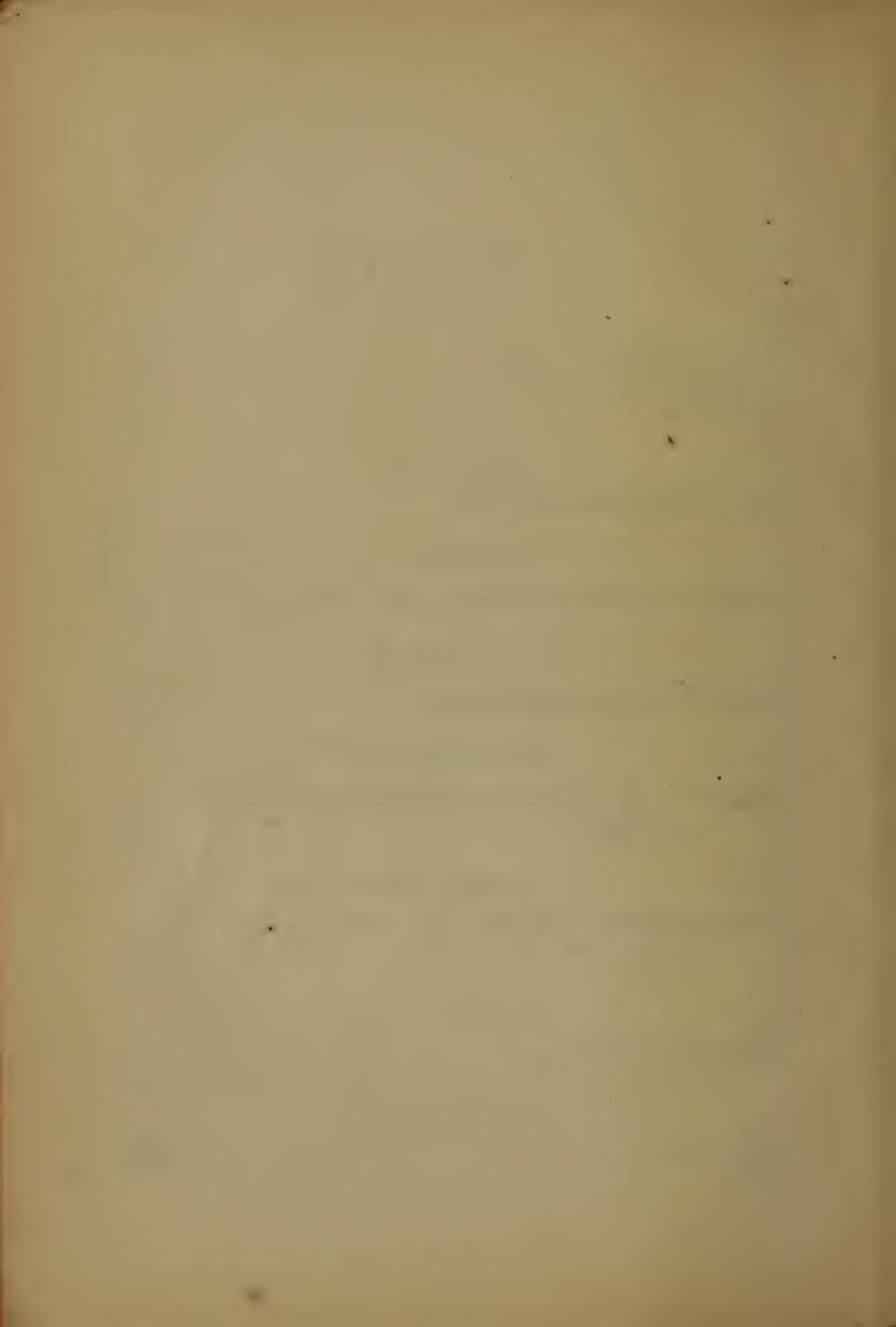
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TO MY FATHER,
WHO IS TO ME
THE BEST ILLUSTRATION
OF THE
NOBLE LIFE,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.



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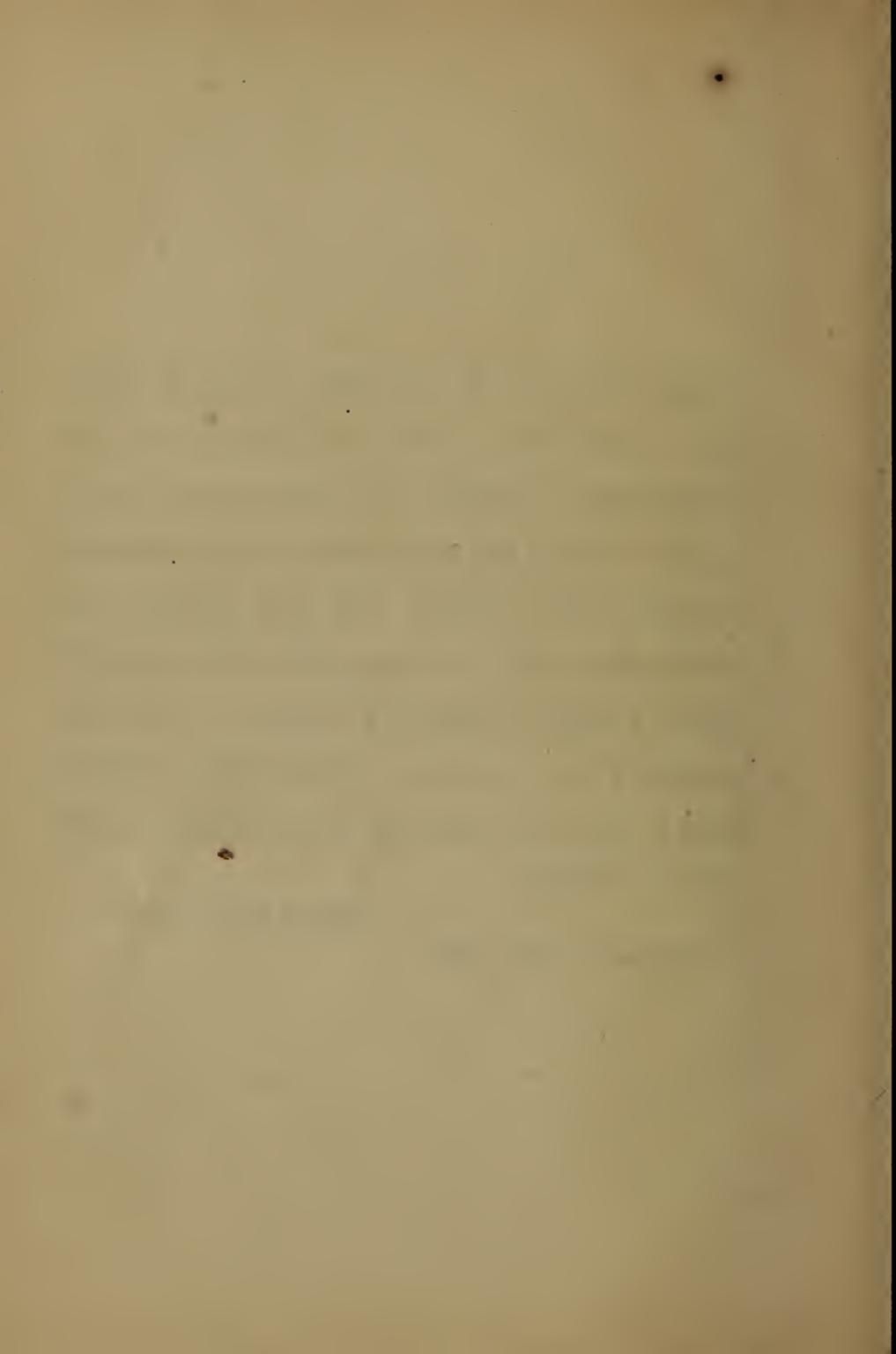
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ALL Scripture is profitable. It is a seed-bed of principles. Customs change, but the Human Heart remains. In these pages I have sought to bring the principles of the Ancient Scripture into contact with the Conduct of our Modern Life. If any path shall be made clearer I shall be glad and thankful. As far as possible I have tried to indicate what suggestions I may have received from others through various reading.

WAYLAND HOYT.

BROOKLYN, *Feb.*, 1881.



CHAPTER I.

THE CALL TO THE NOBLE LIFE.

FEW things can be more startling than to spend a day in disinterred Pompeii. There you are amid surroundings eighteen centuries old. There you stand in the same houses and in the same streets in which dwelt and walked the subjects of the Roman Emperor Titus. You see the well-curbs over the wells worn by the friction of the ropes. You see the ruts in the stone pavements of the streets hollowed by the wheels of the clumsy Roman carts. You see the bakers' shops and bakers' ovens, and sometimes even the loaves of bread put within those ovens by the bakers' hands on that fateful day when the volcanic ashes fell. You see the palaces of the wealthy and the homes of the poor. You enter the house of Sallust, of Marcus Lucretius, of Procolus, precisely as you would that of your friend in any

modern city. You look upon the very frescoes glowing yet upon the walls in which they took delight. You are in their bedrooms and their dining-rooms. You wait beside the fountains which scattered coolness for them so long ago.

Thus surrounded it is not difficult, by a little use of your imagination, to people those streets with their old inhabitants. It does not seem that it would be a hard thing to hold a conversation with Sallust or Procolus. You are living in the first century rather than in the nineteenth. The door of that ancient life is open for you; you enter and behold it exactly as it was.

Dean Stanley tells us that "the unchanged habits of the East"—the land of Abraham, the land of Moses, the land of Christ—"render it in this respect a kind of living Pompeii. The outward appearances, which in the case of the Greeks and Romans we know only through art and writing, through marble, fresco, and parchment, in the case of Jewish history, we know through the forms of actual men living and moving before us, wearing almost the same garb, speaking in almost the same

language, and certainly with the same general turns of speech and tone and manners.”*

So it is not very hard to get a quite clear vision of this ancient and Scriptural scene :

“ Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

“ And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.

“ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

“ So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him, and Lot went with him: And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

“ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go

* “History of the Jewish Church.” First Series,
p. 12.

into the land of Canaan : and into the land of Canaan they came.”*

What was beheld on some day four thousand years ago, is to be seen now any day in that Eastern land. Look upon the journeyings and encampments of a Bedouin chief to-day, and you look upon a very nearly perfect picture of the journeyings and encampments of Abraham way back there in the childhood of the world.

Here come the camels, kneeling down with many a grunt and murmur, ready for their burdens. Yonder stretches the long and swaying line of them, making their noiseless way over the desert sands with cushioned feet. Round about them are the flocks of sheep and goats and asses cast into shadow by their towering forms. There is the patriarchal chief, the center of this stir of movement ; or when the hot noon comes, resting within his tent with the rest of the encampment grouped around. There is his tent, made of the black goats’ hair, marked by his cloak of brilliant scarlet, at whose door is

* Gen. xii. 1-5.

set the spear, his symbol of authority. There is the tent for the chief's wife—her own tent in which she makes the cakes and prepares the usual meal of milk and butter.*

As it is now, so was it then. Abraham was such a chief, and it was such a caravan which trailed along the desert sands and rested through the noon heats, and slept beneath the steady stars when the Father of the Faithful and the Friend of God departed out of Haran, with his face set toward the unknown country which God should show him,

The question comes, Why the starting and the pushing onward of this caravan led by Abraham toward this unknown land ?

The movement of this caravan is one of the pivot scenes of history. Or let me change the figure. Far up amid those Western mountains, forming the divide of the continent, burst forth the springs of the Missouri, that imperial river, the true Mississippi, draining the continent eastward and southward, and furnishing a pathway

* "History of the Jewish Church." First Series,
pp. 12, 13.

for the commerce of a nation. It is wonderful to stand beside those gathering springs and think of the journey those waters take, and of the vast duty they accomplish before they find their home in the distant Gulf.

This caravan trailing across that Eastern desert forms the head-waters of our history and of our civilization. You and I are different because of that old-time journey. The face of human society wears other features because of that march of Abraham's, precisely as the face of our continent would wear other features had the Missouri never cut its channel. In this respect this ancient journey is full of interest and worthy of our study.

And in another respect as well. This journey, the motives which led to it, and its outcome, form a picture and example of a true life, and the story of a true life never can grow old as long as men and women are born into this strange world and are to be set at living true lives amid its temptations, hindrances, sorrows, disappointments, mysteries.

Why, then, did this caravan start, which we see moving across that desert amid the dim-

ness of four thousand years? What was the reason behind this setting forth by Abraham for the unknown country which God should show him?

Well, the country from which Abraham set forth, and the people whom he left behind, were a country and a people defiant in and damaged by idolatry.

This Scripture tells us. If you will turn to the last address of Joshua to the assembled Israelitish tribes, when now at length they have entered into their inheritance, and are comfortably settled in the promised land, you will find that in the last chapter of the book of Joshua he uses language like this : Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood—that is, the river Euphrates—in the old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods.*

It is probable that the form of that ancient idolatry was the worship of fire and of the sun.

There is an old legend—it is legend, it is not

* Joshua xxiv. 2.

Scripture—which represents Abraham as himself infected with this idolatry, but as subsequently turning toward the true worship and standing for that: “When night overshadowed Abraham he saw a star and said, This is my Lord; but when it set, he said, I like not those that set. And when he saw the moon rising he said, This is my Lord; but when the moon set, he answered, Verily, if my Lord direct me not in the right way, I shall be as one of those who err. And when he saw the sun rising, he said, This is my Lord; this is greater than the star or moon. But when the sun went down, he said, O my people, I am clear of these things; I turn my face to Him who made the heaven and the earth.”*

But whether the legend be true or not, this much we may safely say of Abraham: he lived in a country of idolaters; his fathers and his relatives were idolaters. Perhaps, as other legends say, he was the only one who really and resolutely stood for the worship of the true

* Quoted in “History of the Jewish Church.” First Series, page 19.

God. This much is true: Ur of the Chaldees was an idolatrous country. It was a land of sin.

And now to Abraham dwelling amid such sinful scenes and surroundings, and possibly himself somewhat infected by them, comes the call of God. Now the Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. The Lord of glory appears to him, Stephen tells us.* What the shining was, how the voice spoke, we do not know. This we do know: God called Abraham. It was a peremptory, commanding call. Get thee out unto a land that I will show thee. It was a call to the rupture of the old ties of the past. It was a call to a long and difficult journey in the present. It was a call to mist and uncertainty for the future, only overarched by this shining word, that Abraham should not go forth unled and on a fool's errand, but to a land which God should show him, where he should find blessing for himself and his posterity.

* Acts vii. 2.

Here, then, were the reason and the motive behind this journey—Obedience to the Call of God and Faith in the Word of God.

Well, is this all of it?—just that nearly four thousand years ago Abraham took this journey across the shifting desert sands from somewhere in the northern part of the Assyrian plains, southward and westward into Palestine, and that he did it in obedience to the command of God, and that subsequently his posterity became a mighty nation, who through their religious ideas have influenced the world—is this all of it? No.

This ancient journey has a very real and practical relation to you and me. I said just now that the story of a true life never could grow old, as long as men and women were set at living true lives in this troubulous world. I have been writing what I have in order that you might see the practical relation of this ancient journey to yourselves the more clearly. For the principles and motives underneath that, are the principles and motives which must necessarily be those underneath a true life anywhere. And so I ask you in the light

of this old story of Abraham as I have so far told it, to think with me a little about a matter very practical to every one of us, namely : *The Call to the Noble Life.*

Notice first, that the call to the noble life is always a call primarily to yielding, to sacrifice.

That was the first thing which struck on Abraham's ear when God called him. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house. Get thee out, leave them behind; yield them. The journey took its rise in sacrifice.

And the reason is evident enough. Abraham's was a country and kindred of star-worshipers, and moon-worshipers, and sun-worshipers. But Abraham was chosen by God for this very thing—that he might be kept and nurtured in the worship of Jehovah, and that into the minds of his posterity might be thrust and fixed the thought of the one only and righteous Lord. In order to this, Abraham and his posterity after him, must be separated from the influence and infection of idolatry. And so the first step for Abraham in the way to this noble life and destiny, was neces-

sarily a step of yielding, of sacrifice. He must put behind him the bad infection. The worship of the Sun and the worship of Jehovah could not coincide. Whatsoever could cause mist between the face of Abraham and the face of the true God must be yielded, even though it might be country, kindred, father's house. Yielding—sacrifice ; this then was and must be the first syllable in the divine call.

Now here is something I would call a structural truth. When a man would build a temple, or a bridge, or an aqueduct, he must build it according to some structural idea, or he can not build at all. If he is to build a gothic temple with its curved lines, and pointed arches, and lifted turrets, and soaring spire, he can not build a Grecian temple with its straight lines and sides, and roof rectangular. If he is to build a suspension-bridge, he can not build a bridge upheld on arches. If he is going to run an aqueduct underground, he can not run it as the ancient Romans did upon pillars braided together by graceful masonry. The structural idea is king ; king it must be. So it is with life. You can not help building life

after the fashion of the main idea. And now just here I find a structural truth for life; that by no other gate possibly can you enter upon a noble life than through just this gate of a grand yielding—of a thorough sacrifice. I say it reverently, and yet I say it, not even God himself can build you another gate.

And the reason is evident enough. If Abraham is to be solely and simply a worshiper of Jehovah, then he must yield and put aside those things which would clash with and hinder his worship of Jehovah. That is to say, choice of God must exclude the choice of whatever is opposed to God.

And do not think that this inexorable necessity of a primal yielding is confined to the religious life. It is rather a necessity as wide as life, and as many-sided.

Here is the Canaan of a competency opening before some young man. Well then, if he would enter it, he must get out of the country, and kindred, and father's house of indolence—of late hours at night, and late hours in the morning—of carelessness in the use of money, of unthrift.

Here is the Canaan of learning, of scholarship opening before some young man. Well then, if he would enter it, he must get out of the country, and kindred, and father's house, of shabby study, and indiscriminate hurried reading and misty half knowledge.

Here is the Canaan of physical health opening before somebody. Well then, if he would enter it, he must get out of the country, and kindred, and father's house of dissipation, and liquor-drinking, and licentiousness.

Anywhere and everywhere a choice excludes its opposite. Its opposite must be yielded. You must build an altar, and bind to the horns of it as a sacrifice whatever opposes. There is no other way. There can be no other.

And so God's call to the noble life in Him, must be first of all a call to yielding. If with Abraham you would serve and worship God, then that which hinders must be gotten out of.

"Stop a minute. Just here I once fought for my soul's life, and by the grace of God won it."

"Pray tell me about it," the friend replied.

"It happened in the time of my clerkship

soon after coming from my country home to the city. I left my room one Friday evening for a stroll by this Back Bay. While standing here a moment, I was hailed by a young clerk whom I had often met in Kilby Street. He was two years older than myself, smart, clever, with an air and manners that to me were very attractive.

"Looking toward the 'hill' over there, then notorious for its haunts of evil pleasures, he said: 'I'm so lucky to have met you; now come up the hill with me, we'll have such a nice time.'

"Young and social myself, it seemed impossible to resist. How could I? Having taken a few steps toward the hill, all at once the sight of the chapel in the rear of the church reminded me of an indefinite promise I had made to an old friend that I would join him some time on Friday evening at the weekly prayer-meeting there. But I was moving the other way. It seemed now as if I heard his voice of warning: 'If you go yonder to-night, you will never again feel like going to the chapel. Which party will you join; answer?'

"It was the crisis of my life. Here I stood where two ways met. The debate was torture. I prayed inwardly. Power came. I stopped short, mentioned the pledge given to my older friend, bowed, and hastened to the chapel."

This is the true statement from his own lips of the entrance into the noble life of a great merchant.

Do you not see plainly now the hill and the chapel could not go together? How in order to meet God in the chapel the young man must sacrifice the Sin upon the hill?

Yielding: this is necessarily the first syllable in God's call to the noble life. Where idolatry hinders His worship, you may not tarry. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house.

But in the second place will you notice that the call to a Noble Life, is a call to *Keeping*.

It is a very common notion of the Noble Life—the Christian life—that it is a life altogether of yielding and of sacrifice; that its closest designation is that of restriction, narrowness, gloom, pleasurelessness; that its best symbol is the monk's cell, with its stone floors,

and grated windows, and dim light; and not the open heavens with the blue sky and streaming sunshine, with flowers beneath the feet, and graceful trees scattering the benediction of their tender shade above your head.

How many does this notion keep from the Noble Life. There is the wicket gate, and here is the Pilgrim. Says the Pilgrim, If now I pass through that narrow gate, then for all my life I can have nothing wider. Ah! he forgets the Beulah land and the shining city.

Now what I want to try to have you understand, is, that you are wrong altogether here; that while the wicket gate is narrow, it is not so narrow, that while the first note of the call to the noble life is always and necessarily a call to yielding, the second note is just as clearly and soundingly a call to Keeping.

Let us look at Abraham and see it all illustrated in him. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house—leave them, separate thyself from them. Yes, that was certainly the first rough accent of the call. But let us see in what plight Abraham must go out in obedience to the call.

Must he go out a man stripped of everything? Must he go out a lonely pilgrim to take his solitary way along the desert sands? Must he have no camel to ride on, no tent to rest in, nothing which shall cheer his pilgrimage, nothing whatever of the possessions and the dear delights of life?

Why, look and see, certainly it is *not* thus that Abraham goes forth in obedience to the call of God. Listen: And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and unto the land of Canaan they came.

Abraham is by no means a man bereft of everything going out in obedience to God. The gate of that Noble Life is certainly wide enough to take in a great many things besides Abraham's simple self. What things he had before God's call, those things he has now, that it has come and he obeys it. A prosperous man before, he is a prosperous man after. That call of God, which certainly was a call to

yielding, is just as certainly a call to keeping too.

What is the principle underlying here? Why, it is just the principle which the Apostle so magnificently enunciates: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all are yours.*"* The call to the Noble Life is a call to a grand keeping after all.

But let us look at Abraham there a moment somewhat minutely, and see just what he must yield, just what he may keep.

Country, kindred, father's house—these he must yield. Why? because, as I have shown you, these were all infected with idolatry, and tarrying among them would be the obscuration of Abraham's devotion to the one true God.

Sarah his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, the souls that they had gotten in Haran, these he might keep. Why? because these were in nowise hindrances to the true worship of the true God to which Jehovah called him.

* 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

He must yield what hindered, and that was all he must yield. He might keep, and hold, and enjoy everything which did not hinder.

The Noble Life is not one narrow and restricted, and crowded only with the piercing spears of sacrifice. The monk's cell is not its symbol. That Canaan toward which Abraham was going, that good land with its lifted ranges of the snowy Hermon, beautiful in their whiteness against the deep blue of the eastern sky—with its broad and fertile intervals golden with their harvests, with its hill-sides draperied with grape-vines, with its flocks and herds, with its sweet streams fighting away the desert, with its pomegranates and its figs, with its homes and its joys, and its peace, and its worship—that is its symbol. Only the infected things, the wrong things, the hindering things, only these must you yield. Every rightful thing, everything which will not prevent you from God, every cultured taste, every innocent pleasure, everything upon which you can feel that God's smile rests; these are yours, not to yield, but to keep, and to be but the more blessed in their keeping, because just as the

sunshine brings out the colors of the flowers, the sunlight of His smile shall make appear the more radiant colors of your joys.

But in the last place, the call to the Noble Life is a call to *Following*. Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that *I* will show thee.

I remember a passage from "De Quincy" which moved me deeply when I read it, because it spoke so to my inner heart: "All men come into this world alone. All leave it alone. Even a little child has a dread whispering consciousness that if he should be summoned to travel into God's presence, no gentle nurse will be allowed to lead him by the hand, nor mother to carry him in her arms, nor little sister to share his trepidations. King and priest, warrior and maiden, philosopher and child, all must walk those mighty galleries alone!" Have you never thought of that? Have you never been sometimes appalled at your own loneliness? You have been perhaps captured in a fog: mist behind, before, around. And you shut away from everybody and straining your

eyes never so hard though you might, not knowing exactly the way to go. Is not that like your life and mine? Alone and unable to see much.

And have you not felt at such times that your deepest need was a hand to clasp yours and a voice to tell you the way? A hand great enough to lead you, and a voice searching enough and tender enough to reach your solitary soul.

Well, that is for you and for me too, just that. When a man gives himself to God as Abraham did, then God does not play false to that man, as He did not to Abraham. God can not. He must disown His nature first.

Unto a land that *I* shall show thee. And if you are only true to God, if you only choose Him first and foremost, then all His great divine leadership falls down upon you like a mother's love. You may not be able to see the way. I am quite sure Abraham could not; he did not know *where* that track over the desert was taking him; but, though you may not be able to see the way, you may be very sure you are *in the way*, because God has pledged to you His leading.

And when at last the end is reached, and the shadows fall thickly, and the buffeting breath will only come in gasps, and it grows so strangely dark, and your grasp loosens on the hand of every earthly friend; why, even then you need fear no evil, for the Leader's hand is still upon you, and the Leader's voice shall whisper sustainingly though you can hear no other sound—Unto a land that I will show thee.

And then the music-burst of the angels, and the welcome of the Master! The land is gained.

CHAPTER II.

TRIAL—THE WRONG TREATMENT AND THE RIGHT.

THAT was a very wonderful country to which God led Abraham, of which He had said, "Unto a land that I shall shew thee."*

It was to be the home of the posterity of Abraham, to whom were to be made and who were to keep the revelation and the knowledge of the One true God.

Precisely to this end was this land of the Divine showing adapted. There was no other patch of country on the earth's surface *so* adjusted to such an end. It was no accident which set the feet of the Father of the Faithful within such confines.

Two things were true of this singular Canaan, which Abraham reached at last after that

* Genesis xii. 6, 20; xiii. 1, 4.

desert journey toward the unknown, in obedience to the call of God.

It was a land of Isolation. It is bounded by a “great sea of land on the east, and by a great sea of waters on the west.” It is a land shut in by mountain ranges on the north, and by waterless wastes upon the south. The sea-coast is sheer and harborless. The mountain ranges are high and hostile to travel. The stretches of sand and barrenness on the eastern and the southern sides are broad and difficult to cross. It is a land secluded—standing apart strangely. As is no other on the habitable globe, it is a ground alone.

Why God should show Abraham such a lonely country, is evident enough ; looking backward as we do on the history of it, and not forward, as Abraham must toward the future. Evil communications corrupt good manners. There is the mighty power of a bad atmosphere. Sin is contagion. Custom is a tremendous social force. Public opinion is a tidal tendency. The world over idolatry had gotten the upperhand. Instead of the One God, there were gods many. The sun, the moon, the stars, and even the ob-

jects of a worship less natural and intelligent had usurped the worship of the Supreme.

Now God had a great lesson to teach mankind—the lesson of His personality, of His unity, of His authority. He chose to teach it through the revelation to, and the culture of, a single designated man, and afterward of a single designated nation springing from that man as ancestor. Abraham and his descendants must be put at school for the learning of the grand lesson. What they needed was seclusion for the thorough learning of it. Just as we put children into quiet schools and colleges for their better culture, for the profounder and quicker study of that which they will need when life begins to task them, so God chose for Abraham and the Israelites a guarded school and college defended by seas and mountains and deserts, that there, with hostile influences hindered, they might grasp and grow into the first truth of all true religion—that of the spiritual, personal, single, holy Jehovah.

But this other thing, besides, was also true of that singular Canaan.

While it was a land isolated, it was also a

land central and in relation with other countries. Palestine combined in a marvelous way these two opposite qualities of seclusion and of intercourse. "It lies at a corner where Asia, Africa, and Europe meet, or all but touch. The six ancient States of Babylon, Assyria, Media, Persia, Phœnicia, and Egypt stood round about it. The main lines of ancient traffic ran close past its border. Whenever for purposes of war or trade bodies of men sought to pass from the populous and powerful States of the North, whose center lay along the Euphrates, to the populous and powerful States of the South, whose center lay along the Nile, there was only one road by which they could travel,"* alongside of or through Palestine. Why, that plain of Esdraelon, in the northern part of Palestine, has been oftener the place of the battle-clash of opposing nations than any other single spot in the broad earth. Says Carl Ritter, the great and famous modern German geographer: "No country is so situated in re-

* "Abraham the Friend of God," by Oswald Dykes, D.D., page 49.

lation to three great continents and five great bodies of water. None unites such amazing contrasts—perfect isolation and independence, with the ability to go out from this isolation and establish relations with all the greatest nations of antiquity.”*

Why God chose such a land of openness, as well as of seclusion, for Abraham and his descendants is also evident enough.

Israel was to learn the undermost religious lesson of the one true God not for itself alone. It was God’s promise to Abraham that in him should *all families* of the earth be blessed. Abraham and Israel were to be a fountain sending forth their waters—not a pool keeping its waters to itself. Channels were needed for the waters. Having gotten the knowledge of God, Israel was to spread the knowledge of God. When seclusion had wrought its work, then intercourse was to do its duty. There was chance for both, and for both in the same land. Is it not wonderful? Did I not speak

* Quoted in “Abraham the Friend of God,” by Oswald Dykes, D.D., page 51.

rightly when I said a moment since it was no accident which set the feet of the Friend of God within such confines?

I said there were two things—seclusion and chance for intercourse—peculiar to this land which God declared He would show Abraham.

There was a third thing. The essence of religion is dependence. The religious spirit is a spirit which all the time confesses that it hangs on God—on God and on God only—in the last analysis. Not on the stability of the seasons; not on the certainty of the early and the latter rain; not on the seed-sowing and the harvest; not on the steadiness of natural law, but behind all and causing all and moving all on God. The utterance of the religious spirit is the song of the Psalmist: “The eyes of all wait upon Thee. *Thou* givest them meat in due season. *Thou* openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”

Now this Canaan was a country singularly fitted to be the training ground of such religious dependence. It was a country of fertile soil, and of most various production. Wheat waved there; grapes hung there; figs clustered

there ; pomegranates abounded there ; grasses sprang dense and nutritious there ; herds crowded there ; milk and honey flowed there. But at the same time it was a country frequently and suddenly susceptible to severe disaster. The snow-clad mountains bred sometimes frosty winds biting to their vitals the tender crops. The outlying and yet not distant desert sands sometimes prevented with their hot breaths the early or the latter rain, or sent forth blistering breezes before which the crops fell fainting. So a threatening of uncertainty hung constantly over the dwellers in that country. They could not fix their faith on uncertain seasons ; they were forced to send their faith beyond them, that it might clasp the certain God. Iron regularity did not breed doubt of the value and reach of Prayer. Every now and then there would come crises when Famine would force to prayer. Materialism could not build its low dome above them and shut out the Heavens. Men were pushed into the constant thought of a higher Presence ; and, to use Herbert Spencer's word, their very "environment" ministered to dependence upon

Jehovah. It is easy enough to see how such a training ground was needful for a people who were to be the depositories and the preachers of the truth of God.

So much, then, for the country in which Abraham found himself, listening to the Divine call and going forth under the Divine leading. This is the practical point—evident certainly from all I have been saying. Standing there in Canaan, Abraham was standing in the place of his duty, and that place of duty was precisely adapted to the designs of God for Abraham, to the realization of the noble destiny God meant for him. So it was for Abraham henceforth the place most right and the place most safe. I but repeat a truism when I say that the place of Duty is the right place, and in the highest sense the safest place for any man.

Lord Macaulay* tells us that at the siege of Naumur, in the year 1695, on the 17th of July, the first counterscarp of the town was attacked. The English and Dutch were thrice repulsed with great slaughter, and returned thrice to the

* "History of England." Vol. 7, page 242.

charge. At length, in spite of the exertions of the French officers, who fought valiantly, sword in hand, on the glacis, the assailants remained in possession of the disputed works. While the conflict was raging, King William Third of England, Prince of Orange, who was giving his orders under a shower of bullets, saw with surprise and anger, among the officers of his staff, Michael Godfrey, the deputy-governor of the Bank of England. This gentleman had come to the king's headquarters in order to make some arrangements for the speedy and safe remittance of money from England to the army in the Netherlands, and was curious to see real war. Such curiosity William could not endure. "Mr. Godfrey," he said, "you ought not to run these hazards; you are not a soldier; you can be of no use to us here." "Sir," answered Godfrey, "I run no more hazard than your Majesty." "Not so," said William; "I am where it is my duty to be, and I may without presumption commit my life to God's keeping; but you—" While they were talking a cannon ball from the ramparts laid Godfrey dead at the king's feet. Well, the

cool, clear-headed king but told a truth to which no human heart can help responding. The place of duty is for every man the sacred-est and in the noblest sense the safest. Mr. Godfrey was foolishly meddlesome, hazardous, not courageous, and merited his fate.

But now—there is this common fallacy about the place of Duty. Sunny skies, blooming flowers, smooth paths—Canaan, with never a cold breath from snowy Hermon, with never a hot breath from the neighboring sands, with the unfailing falling of the early and the latter rain, making the grass green and the flowers glow—that is the place of Duty, we are all and always too apt to say. We are in a constant wonder if we do not find it so.

And yet we can never always find it so, notwithstanding our continual surprise. There is, indeed, “a sun behind the sun,” shining ever upon the place of duty. There is a sweet and inward consciousness of right. There is a profound, abiding satisfaction in the being and the doing what we ought. That higher sun is undimmed always. But the lower sun of outward circumstance, of apparent and quick

success, of an external pleasantness, is dimmed often by disastrous clouds, and seems sometimes even to be altogether blotted out.

That is to say, the place of Duty is quite as often the place of a rocky trial as of smoothness; and because in the place of Duty, Trial comes upon us and frightens us with its stony pitiless gaze, and seizes us in its cruel hands, we are not for that reason to think we are not in the place in which God would have us stand.

Why, there were those early Christians in Lystra and in Iconium and in Antioch. Paul and Silas were on a missionary tour, and they had a special divine message for these Christians; and this was their message: They went from place to place, "confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."* There these disciples were, squarely where they ought to be; in their houses and in their business places, and in the streets of those wicked

* Acts xiv. 22.

cities they were trying to do their duty, to be Christian, to pierce that heathen darkness with the shining of Christian lives; they were *in the Faith*; but because they were just where they ought to be, they could not therefore expect safe and sunny times. Paul and Silas came to them to tell them they must expect something expressly different; that we must through much *tribulation* enter into the kingdom of God. Though they were just where they ought to be—in the faith—yet Trial was to grip them. The domain of Trial includes the place of Duty. Some one else has suggested these four reasons for Trial :

Trial is for probation. “A man must be proved before he can be approved.” Trial is training. And just as a tree would die if it stood always in the sunlight, with never the cooling wrap of the night air, or the rain dropping from the dull cloud, or the push of the tempest straining the roots in its hard wrestle making them grasp the ground more firmly, so our souls would flag and flatten into a poor, tame imbecility if we were not sometimes even roughly proved by Trial.

Trial is for purification. It is the furnace which consumes the dross and sets the gold free for its mission of beauty or of value; and there is nothing which burns away the dross of evil motive in us—if we only meet it rightly—as does a touch of Trial.

Trial is for fellowship with God, with the Highest and the Holiest. The hills of Canaan are very beautiful when the grass is green and the grapes are plenty. But grass and grapes are not the thing a *Soul* can live on. Yet there is a constant tendency to test the value and success of life by such low things as these. Like the rich man in the parable, we are so apt to think more of the filled barns than of the God who gave the harvests, compelling us to widen out the barns. So the pleasant hills must grow sometimes scant and the vines refuse to drape themselves along the trellis, in order that, forced from the decaying Earthly, new thought may rise to the substantial Heavenly—to real and longing fellowship with God.

Trial is for the sake of others. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. We are braided together in this world of ours.

A religion stalwart in a storm is the kind of religion other people caught in storms can get heart by. To suffer well and nobly is sometimes the most helpful ministry we can possibly be engaged in.*

The place of Duty does not always lie outside the domain of Trial. Often the place of Duty *is* the place of Trial.

It was thus just now with Abraham. Here he was standing in the land to which God had promised He would point him. As I have shown you, it was the very land best fitted to accomplish God's designs, and to lead Abraham onward into the lifted destiny God meant for him. He had not been in it very long. He had only tarried for a little time in Sichem, and then gone southward into the more open country of the plain of Moreh, and then passed upward and eastward to a place overlooking the beautiful country in the neighborhood of Bethel, and builded altars for God's worship, and had a precious season of the shining of God's

* "The Little Sanctuary," by Alexander Raleigh, D.D., pages 32, 42.

special presence, for the Lord appeared unto him;* before Trial struck him with its harshest blows. There he was just like a modern Bedouin chief; with a great train of dependents—family, servants; with crowding herds—camels, sheep, goats, asses; with ever so many mouths to fill, absolutely dependent for supply upon the grasses, and the grains, and the grapes the country should produce. And then the clouds began to refuse to gather in the sky; the ceaseless sun began to drink the wells and streams away; the pleasant verdure on the hill-sides and in the plains was all burned up; and Famine began to lay its hunger on the people and its death upon the herds.

There was little commerce in those days. The fullness of one portion of the earth was not quickly carried to supply the emptiness of another portion. There Abraham was, shut up to famine; hunger was in his tent; hunger was in all the tents; hunger was in the herds; and thirst as well; and death stood upon the heels of thirst and hunger.

* Gen. xii. 9.

I remember I was riding through the wilderness of the Northwest once on a long march and in a desperately hot day, and through a very sterile country, and for a long time we could come upon no stream. We searched every gully which we passed, but each only mocked us, and the yards seemed to lengthen into miles. We grew so faint, and the animals began to fail; and then how refreshing were the waters of the stream we did strike at last toward nightfall; how we hailed it, and were thankful for it as we saw it in the distance! And I remember thinking then what a terrible thing it would be to have the water all dried up along a march of many days, and to have the grass all turned to ashes by the hot rays of the sun.

Well, Famine in its worst form struck Abraham. He was in the place of Duty, but at the same time he was in the grip of Trial.*

And now the vital question was—precisely the question which you and I must often be compelled to meet in this trial-ful life of ours—

* Gen. xii. 10.

How should he treat this Trial, striking him here in this country which God had shown him—in the place of his Duty?

Now, because a man figures in the Bible, we are not, therefore, to put ourselves upon theount for all manner of excuses for his wrong-doing. I am sure we are never to do that. I am sure that is just the way for us to miss some of the most valuable teachings of the Bible. A reverence for the Bible which compels us to that, is not reverence; it is idolatry. Wrong is wrong, inside the Bible as well as outside of it. We ought the rather to bravely say, he may be a Bible character, but he did this and that wrong thing, and what I am to do is to profit by his example and shun such wrong; shun it, not tumble into it, though we have for it even the example of a Bible saint. Such examples are given us in the Bible, not that we may do the same, but that we may refuse to do the same.

Now I am sure that Abraham answered this question of how he should treat this Trial, meeting him here in the place of his Duty in the wrong way.

Notice this wrong treatment of Trial, that

by contrast we may find out the right. We have seen that this Canaan which God showed Abraham was a country susceptible to sudden and severe disaster, like this of Famine. Egypt was not such a country. It was not dependent upon rain. Through its entire length there swept the fertilizing steady Nile. Twice every year that river overflowed its banks. When its waters had receded, there was left a deposit of the richest soil, soaked with their moisture; out of that soil the harvest quickly sprung, and its roots were kept unwithered amid the fiercest heat by constant irrigation from the river. So, while there might be Famine gaunt in Palestine, there would be opulence in Egypt.

And now even Abraham did this pitiable thing. Instead of standing in the place of his Duty in Canaan and meeting his Trial with an unfaltering trust in God, he ran away from his Duty and relaxed his trust in God. "And there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was grievous in the land."* There is

* Gen. xii. 10.

no hint that he asked God's counsel. He did not pray about it at any of God's altars. He took matters into his own hands, and ran.

Notice now what of result came to Abraham through this wrong treatment of his Trial; for it was just as true for Abraham as it is for any other man, that while he was a king in the realm of choice, he was a slave in the realm of the result of choice. It was given to Abraham, as it is to you and me, freely to do wrong if we may so choose. But neither could Abraham nor can you or I hinder the issue and moral blight succeeding a wrong choosing.

This was the first result: *He lost the consciousness of the Divine favor, the shining of the Divine presence, the privilege of prevailing prayer.* For, search the chapters through and you can not find that in Egypt Abraham lifted any altars toward his God. That was the first thing he did, however, when he reached Canaan. He was constantly lifting them there, one at Sichem, one at the mountain east of Bethel, calling upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord answering in blissful and visible appearance. This he did not do in Egypt—never

once. And he did not, because he could not. He had put a chasm between himself and God. He had thrust his wrong into God's face. He could not pray through it. No incense of any altar could pierce it; no shining of God's presence could stream through it. He was precisely in that place in which God could not bless him. He was in Egypt, not in Canaan.

This was the second result: *Fear forced him into mean deceit.* How brave is that man who is sure he is standing in his Duty; how jubilant the consciousness that even the stars in their courses are fighting for him; how free his soul; how certain is he that he is in the clasp of the Everlasting Arms. Conscience makes cowards of us all only when we are out of the place whither conscience points. In that place this same conscience will gird us with a triple armor. But when we stand in Egypt rather than in Canaan, what shapes of various fears assail.

The Egyptian females were noted for their want of beauty. They were not shapely, they were dark-skinned.

But Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was beauti-

ful to look upon. She was of fair complexion, and since people lived so much longer then than they do now, was just now in the full bloom of her matronly prime.

And the King of Egypt, as is the manner of Oriental monarchs, was in the constant quest of beautiful women; and if a husband chanced to stand inconveniently in the way, that made no difference. For His Absolutism it was the easiest thing in the world to slay the husband and capture the wife. All this Abraham knew. And with the knife of his wrong, stabbing to the heart his trust in God, he was naturally enough shaking with a selfish fear. And this fear forced him into the meanest possible deceit. So Abraham said to Sarah: "Behold, now I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me; but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee."* Could anything be more

* Gen. xii. 12, 13.

cowardly and more cruel?—for cowardice is always cruel. Everything noble, straight, courageous, seems to ooze out of Abraham at once. He is a serpent sneaking in the grass; he is not Abraham. He will even dare to think of saving himself behind the dishonor of his own wife, and will do that along the crooked squirming of a lie. O, conscious inward wrong and outward and poor pretence are in bad marriage! He only can be the morally brave man who is the morally right man—Egypt is fertile in meanness. It is only in Canaan that you can grow nobleness.

This was the third result: *Injury to others.* This was a promise *holden*, while Abraham was in Egypt, that in him should all families of the earth be blessed. That was only true for Canaan—the place of his Duty. He was a curse to others outside of that. For, when Pharaoh began to do as Abraham feared he would, then the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

O receive the solemn searching lesson! You can not sin and keep it to yourself; sin is in-

fection. It is only when a man stands in Canaan—that is, in the place of his Duty; bravely, trustfully stands there, even though he must stand there in the grip of Trial—it is only there, it can not be in Egypt, that his life shall be what harvests are—a blessing and a sustenance to others.

I am very sure that the old story comes closely home to some of you. You are where God has placed you; you stand amid such circumstances; such tasks are laid upon you; you are in such a family, or in such position; you are in Canaan. But right there where you are standing such strange Trials come. You can not understand the reason. Often these Trials seem beyond endurance. Your heart fails you. How can you wait and look upon the famine-blighted hills?

But treat your Trial rightly and not wrongly. Do not run from Duty. Stand and trust, even though Famine fasten. Do not pass over even into the Egypt of a heart-rebellion of whining, of a hopeless drudging way of doing what you ought. So long as you are in Canaan you can keep God's altar lifted. The mighty resource

of Prayer is left you—use it, stand firmly, trust; and in His time the smitten hills shall surely grow green again, and the dusty channels of your life sparkle with the waters of delight. And if you *have* gone over into Egypt, why, then as for Abraham, so for you, there is only just one thing to do. “And Abram went up out of Egypt,” “Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.”* Penitence for the past; Re-entrance into Canaan, that is the only thing for you to do.

Wait a little while,
Be sure
Thou'st but one short lifetime
To endure.

Wait a little while,
And trust;
Thou shalt suffer only
What thou must.

Wait a little while;
Above
Is the God who gives you pain
In His love.

* Gen. xiii. 1-4.

Wait a little while ;
His grace
Soon shall bear you quickly
To His face.

Only be sure of this—Canaan is the place
for waiting.

CHAPTER III.

THE POWER OF A BAD CHOICE.

I AM monarch in my choices. I am slave in what my choices bring me.—I do not know a principle for life more controlling, or one which needs to be more steadily kept in mind.

I was lying upon the ground after a very long mountainous ride in the Yellowstone National Park. The men were pitching the tents and I was waiting for them. It was a very beautiful prospect which met my eye—an intervalle of smooth and fertile prairie—hills yonder clothed with dense forests, and far off in the blue distance a range of mountains.

One who knew the country came to lie by my side, and said, “Do you see those mountains in the distance?” “Yes.” “Do you know what they are?” “No, sir. What are they?” “They are a part of the divide of the

continent. The water falling on this side those mountains goes flowing onward to the Gulf of Mexico. The water falling on the other side finds its home at last in the Pacific."

So I lay there thinking how diverse the destiny of the water-drops scattered out of the clouds hovering about those summits. How soon and how certainly will a continent separate them, though they make their home now in the same cloud. What a slight thing will send them here or there—a twist of wind, a pebble forcing their flowing but a little this way or that.

And then the analogy of all this to our human lives came solemnly upon me. How do our destinies diverge and keep diverging as they flow on from dividing choices. What slight things apparently often determine the choices which thenceforth rule our lives.

Yon stream whose sources run
Turned by a pebble's edge,
Is Athabasca, rolling toward the sun
Through the cleft mountain ledge.

The slender rill had strayed,
But for the slanting stone,

To evening's ocean, with the tangled braid
Of foam-flecked Oregon.

So from the Heights of Will
Life's parting stream descends ;
And as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends.

From the same cradle side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea.*

We are unlike the water-drops in this—that concerning many things, and in great measure, we may choose the side to fall on, either this or that. The ability to do this is part of our moral endowment. It constitutes us moral beings. This is one of the fundamental facts of consciousness. This is one of the axioms I must begin with and stand on. This is one of the foundations of the Throne of Conscience. I am uncomelled. I may elect my path. I do freely choose. I can turn toward the Atlantic, or I can turn from it and go to the Pacific.

We are like the water-drops in this—that

* Oliver Wendell Holmes.

having chosen, and keeping on in our prevailing choices, we must be held inexorably to their results. We can not escape the destiny toward which they tend. Having chosen, our power passes; we come under the power of the results of our choices. We must pluck their bloom. We can not go toward the Atlantic and toward the Pacific at one and the same time. Either here or there we may go; but having chosen, just as the trend of the country and the courses of the channels and the force of gravitation pull the water-drops either Atlanticward or Pacificward as was the mountain-side from which it started, so does the destiny potential in our choice compel every one of us.

It is a solemn thought, but a very true one; we may choose, but from that which our choices hold we can not escape.

This fact of dividing choices, which give thenceforward their own tendency and color to all our lives, comes out steadily in all literatures. Xenophon relates the myth of Hercules. When Hercules stood upon the threshold of his manhood, he went apart to think what his future course should be. Soon two female

figures stood before him! One in white apparel, noble in mien, open and innocent in gaze; the other, much painted and bedizened. Drawing nearer, this last ran briskly up, saying, "Oh, Hercules, I see that you are perplexed about your path in life. Make only a friend of me. I will lead you along the smoothest and most charming road. I will see that you are not troubled with business, with battles, with tasks of any kind. This shall be your study: where to find the most luscious dishes and the best wines, the most fragrant scents, the finest clothing, the merriest companions, the maddest amusements. And I will surely provide you too with supplies for all these things."

"And what may be your name?" asked Hercules.

"My name is Pleasure," she replied; "though my enemies have nicknamed me Vice."

Then the other and the nobler drew near, and this was how she spoke: "Hercules, I knew your parents; and as I have seen you in your boyhood, I am sure that you are capable of shining deeds; but I must not deceive you with delusive promises. As the Higher Powers

have arranged the world, you can hope for nothing good or desirable without labor. If you want the gods to be your friends, you must serve them; if you want your field to be fruitful, you must till it. If you would have Greece honor you, you must do genuine duty in her behalf. If you wish to be a mighty warrior, you must bring the body under subjection and submit to discipline.”*

Hercules rose up to follow Virtue. Thus he made his choice. Thus the rewards which Virtue held were his. He slipped the doom of Vice because he chose the way of Virtue. But the resulting doom of Vice must have been his, had he chosen rather to make her companion along the way of life. Even the strong Hercules, though king to choose, was slave to take what his choices brought him.

Now this old fact of choice and its inevitable results—a fact as old as Adam, and yet as fresh and new as the beating pulses of the youngest heart—appears in the Scripture which tells of Abraham and Lot in Palestine.†

* “Memorabilia.” Book 2d, chap. 1st.

† Genesis xiii.

Abraham had come back from Egypt, and Lot had returned with him. They were both prosperous men. They both had flocks and herds and tents. It began to require very roomy pasture to support them. Both must have sufficient grass; both must have sufficient water. So, frequent quarrels began to clash between their respective herdsmen and retainers about the boundaries of pastures and the right to springs and wells. Where quarrels threaten to become chronic, it is better to separate than to keep up constant war. Often to agree to differ is the best way to stop a quarrel. Abraham makes a very right and wise proposal for separation. "And Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."*

It was probably from the summit of the hill

* Gen. xiii. 8, 9.

on which Abraham's altar stood that the two men looked down upon the landscape. In most directions the prospect was not inviting to a shepherd's eye. Northward the fair and fertile vale of Sichem was hidden by the intervening mountains. Westward and southward broken hills tossed their rocky tops in irregular ranges toward the sky. Between them grasses grew indeed, and streams went murmuring on, but these could not be seen for the crowding and barren peaks. But eastward the view was different. There, between the rocky walls on either side, the long green valley of the Jordan, with its abundance of water and its fringe of trees and its margin of pasture rich and deep, met the eye; and there to the south and east, where the Jordan found its home in the salt sea, the mountains halted, and a broad, smooth interval appeared, more like the level plains of Egypt than was usual in Palestine, welcoming with a fresher greenness, in scattered flowers and gathered groups of trees telling of a fertility more prolific, more like that Eden whose memory still lingered in men's thoughts—a spot beautiful even as the Garden of the Lord.

"Ah," said Lot, "I will turn eastward. You may have the barren mountains and all the fertile patches you can find between. I will choose this country which is as the Garden of the Lord."*

So there on that hill-top, east of Bethel, Lot determines. He is free to do it. Now, like the water-drops falling on different sides of the divide of the continent, Abraham and Lot separate for their diverse destinies. Lot has chosen the side on which his life shall fall. But having chosen, his choice pushes out the hands of its results and grips him. Thenceforth he is beneath their power and not above them. The water-drop goes flowing onward to its proper sea.

It is the Power of a Bad Choice which the scene suggests. Look, then, that we may discover in what respect this choice of Lot's was bad.

Consider. It was essentially a selfish choice. In all this record there is no hint of any deference on the part of the younger toward the

* Gen. xiii. 11.

older man. Nor is there either any hint of gratitude for such chance for choice proffered by Abraham. The first thought with Lot is plainly Lot himself—where he shall get on the fastest; where his flocks and herds shall have the richest range and the best water. Since Abraham has been so foolish as to present him with such opportunity, he will make the most of it. As to how Abraham can get on, that is not his matter. He makes poor start in life who pushes out into it thinking only of himself. Selfishness is malaria. There can be no such thing as high moral health, and so there can be no strong joy in the life which chooses the low country where such fog falls.

Consider again: that in another respect this choice of Lot's was bad. Amid the fragrant shades of that plain which seemed as beautiful as the Garden of the Lord, gleamed the white walls of at least five cities. These towns were doubtless very small in themselves, but were large compared with the then scanty population of the world. They nestled there among palm-trees and groves of balsam—a genial sun above, the most fertile soil around. Sodom was

the largest and the most influential. She always leads her sister cities in any speech about them. The inhabitants were builders. Sodom was a walled city. They were agriculturists too. Slight toil made the harvests laugh about them. They were traffickers and merchants also. Sodom stood on the main high-way for passage between Babylon and Egypt. Well, what has happened so often since, happened there and then. Wealth flowed in upon the people dwelling in those towns. Then leisure and luxury came in the train of wealth; and out of these sprang up the most shameless license. Vice, dissoluteness, corruption, abounded. From those days down to these Sodom has been the synonym for vice of the worst sort. Those cities, led by Sodom, cradled there in one of the fairest places of the earth, had become the earth's worst plague spot. Afterward—even during the life of Abraham and Lot—God wiped them out for their very wickedness. That was a terrific doom the Scripture hints at.* It was early in the morning. The sun had risen

* Gen. xix. 23, 28.

bright and clear. Perhaps there was a strange oppressiveness in the air; perhaps there were dense thunder-clouds beginning to wrap the mountain summits. Nearer the storm comes, and blacker grow the clouds, and swifter the flashes of the lightning. It is a fearful storm, say the inhabitants; but it will be over soon. It will pass as other storms have passed before it. But it does not pass; it is nearer; it is denser; it is more awful every moment. The birds have stopped their singing. The children are frightened from their play. The streets of the busy city have grown empty; men and women hold their breath for terror.

Now a new danger threatens. Perhaps it was the lightning; perhaps it was other fire falling straight from heaven. I do not know. But that soil was saturated with bitumen. They have baked their bricks from such clay as this, and used the bitumen as mortar to hold their bricks together. And the flame from heaven is answered now by flames springing upward from the earth. Doubtless the ground shakes in the grip of the earthquake too. The buildings flame and fall, and flame

still though fallen. “Houses and temples sought for shelter proved only tombs.” The Lord overthrows these cities and all the plain and all the inhabitants of the cities and that which grew upon the ground; and when Abraham looked from a mountain height toward where the cities were, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

It was cities nurturing such wickedness and soon to merit such a doom which lay within this choice of Lot’s. He did not choose the beautiful country simply, he chose the cities too. The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.* Yet this fact did not make Lot hesitate in his choice. Therefore his choice was bad, because he knowingly turned whither wrong was raging and defiant; because he said, Notwithstanding the evil festering in the beautiful plain, I will yet take the plain.

And now, having made this bad choice, will you be kind enough to go on with me to notice in what respects Lot came under the inevitable and evil power of it.

* Gen. xiii. 13.

Consider, first: In making such bad choice Lot came under the power of the fascination of the evil which the choice held. Evil is a fearful magnet, and men are bits of steel. It is so easy, when you willfully put wrong next you, when you surround yourself with its atmosphere, to become enervated and entangled and overcome.

Old Dr. Emmons preached for fifty years in Franklin, Mass. He was a great preacher, and he was also very pertinacious and even whimsical in his determination to do nothing but preach, and study that he might preach. He lived upon a farm, but he himself would not farm it. His place was in the study and in the pulpit. The farm must get on as best it could through hired hands. One day, they say, he was walking round his farm for exercise, and he came upon a place where somebody had left down the bars, so that the cattle could get through and eat and trample down the crops. It was his first impulse to put up the bars and save his crops. But no, the stiff old man took a second thought. He fell back on his favorite maxim: "If I say A, I must say B"; if I

begin, I must go on. He left the bars down and started for his study.

That may seem foolish, but there was a good deal of wisdom in it. If you do say A, it is so easy to say B, and you are so likely to say it. If you choose the plain in which Sodom and Gomorrah lie, it is so easy to pass from the plain into the bad cities, and you are so likely to do it. Why, you find yourself there almost before you know it.

It is better to go with Abraham, even to the barren heights. The safe side is the wiser side. Concerning the putting one's self under the fascination of the wrong, discretion is always the better part of valor. It is better to be a poorer man than to become a rich one by doing business, if not within the gates, yet under the shadow of the walls of Sodom and Gomorrah. If you choose to do business there, before you know it you will very probably go into the gates. It is better to be a little stiff and unaccommodating, and even illiberal and fanatical and puritanic, as people call it, than to be so immensely liberal that you are quite careless as to whether your way lies through Sodom

and Gomorrah or not. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil, was the daily prayer the Master set upon our lips; and that man is a fool who, like Lot, rather rushes into temptation, entwines about himself an evil fascination, chooses the plain which seems so fertile and so pleasant, notwithstanding the walls of Sodom and Gomorrah gleam out from among its trees.

For, most significant are the touches of the Scripture concerning the effect of the evil fascination wrapped up in this bad choice of Lot. First: Lot chose the plain with Sodom and Gomorrah in it. Second: He pitched his tent toward Sodom—got a little nearer—got within the easier hearing of its siren songs. That is to say, to translate the action into the speech of our common life, the edge of his protest against such evil began to wear somewhat away; he was less in high and earnest desire to please God; he gave up secret and family prayer; he was not quite so distinct and clear-voiced in his confession of godliness—pitched his tent toward Sodom. And then, when afterward the angels came to warn him of the de-

struction threatening the city, they found him sitting in the gate of Sodom; he had become one of the inhabitants of it: more than that, one of the magistrates of it; for the seat in the gate was the seat of the magistrate.

First the plain, with Sodom in it, chosen; then the tent pitched toward Sodom; then the high seat in Sodom. Evil is a fearful magnet, and men are bits of steel.

Consider, further: In making such bad choice, Lot came under the necessity of an enfeebled warning against evil.

In a certain sense, Lot was a good man. In obedience to the Divine command, he set out with Abraham on his wanderings. The Apostle Peter, speaking of him, says: "And God delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among the men of Sodom, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."* I suppose it is barely possible for a man to be a Christian, and at the same time be in places

* 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

where a Christian ought never to be seen. I suppose it is possible. Paul says it is possible—for a man to really build on the only foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ ; but on that foundation, instead of rearing the noble, shining structure of a lifted life—gold, silver, precious stones—to rear instead a shabby and pitiable structure—wood, hay, stubble—which structure the fire shall test and consume, though the man himself may be saved yet so as by fire,* his life-work burned up, himself just saved. I suppose that is possible. But the difference of that man's life must be, compared with a clear, consistent, steady life, the difference between gold and the stubble the cattle trample on in the autumn weather. I suppose Lot was a very poor Christian. And he was such a Christian, because, making his inconsistent choice as to the place and method of his life, he came under the inevitable results of such a choice. And, as I have said, another of these results was this, that his testimony against evil became utterly enfeebled, and worth nothing.

* 1 Cor. iii. 11, 15.

A Christian is a witness. The word martyr means literally a witness—a man who stands for God at any cost, whether the stones strike him, or the flames scorch him, or the rods torture him. But nobody's witnessing for God is worth the breath he uses, if lip and life are speaking all the time a different language. Paul, writing to Timothy, says : Give heed to thyself and to thy doctrine. Be sure of yourself, Timothy ; be sure that your life is the incarnation and illustration of your doctrine; then your preaching will be with power. It is the life which gives efficacy to the speech. Words are but the helpless balls lying beside the cannon. It is only the cannon of the life which can send them straight and telling to the mark. Now Lot, living there in Sodom, sought to do this duty of witnessing for God in Sodom. But living there, and sitting in its gate, his speech had neither push nor edge. Said the Sodomites, "Stand back," when he tried to make them better. Said the Sodomites again, "This fellow came in to sojourn, and he must needs be a judge."*

* Gen. xix. 9.

And then, at last, he is sure the Lord is about to send destruction on the city. He is certain the rain of flame will fall. The angels have told him so. He is anxious and agitated for the safety of his family. "And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law."*

"Thou must be true thyself,
If thou the truth wouldest teach;
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the lips full speech."

Lot, living there in Sodom, coming thus under the dominion of his bad choice, how could he seem otherwise to his sons-in-law than one who mocked?

Consider, further: in making such bad choice, Lot came under the necessity of bringing injury to those he loved the best. I need not wait to tell how the volcanic storm over-

* Gen. xix. 14.

took his wife lingering in her flight. It is not fitting that I tell of the terrific influence this Sodom had upon his daughters. This is the fact, however: you can not make a bad choice for yourself, and hold the power of that bad choice within your single self.

Consider, further: in making such bad choice, Lot must come measurably, at least, under power of the doom belonging to it.

Sodom's fall was Lot's as well.

The doom falls, and on him too, fleeing a lonely pilgrim to the very mountains he had despised before—family ruined, possessions gone, his own life but just saved—a shattered man, getting the doom of a bad choice.

The old story but tells in its own way the real story of every life.

It is given you to choose. That you may freely do; but you must get what the choice holds.

Shun Sodom and Gomorrah; never mind the beauty of the plain in which they lift their gleaming walls.

Bad books are a Sodom and Gomorrah.

Bad friendships are a Sodom and Gomorrah.

Bad places are a Sodom and Gomorrah.

Bad habits are a Sodom and Gomorrah.

Here you stand; here you must stand on the mountain east of Bethel, and take your choice.

But, remember as you take it, you must get what your choice shall hold: the mountain or the plain; the noble destiny of Abraham; or, the pitiable failure of Lot.

I read of the ermine to-day,
Of the ermine who will not step
By the feint of a step in the mire;
The creature who will not stain
Her garment of wild white fire.

Of the dumb, flying, soulless thing
(So we with our souls dare to say),
The being of sense and of sod,
That will not, that will not defile
The nature she took from her God.

And we with the souls that we have,
Go cheering the hunters on
To a prey with that pleading eye.
She can not go into the mud!
She can stay like the snow, and die!

The hunters come leaping on.
She turns like a hart at bay.
They do with her as they will.
. . . O thou who thinkest on this !
Stand like a star, and be still.

Where the soil oozes under thy feet,
Better, ah ! better to die
Than to take one step in the mire.
Oh ! blessed to die or to live,
With garments of holy fire !*

* Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHT ON THE CLOUD; OR, COMFORT FOR THE DISCOURAGED.

LET us think together of an old story of long waiting and final winning which I am sure comes very close to all our lives.

Back there in the beginning, God's call to Abraham had been accompanied by a Promise: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."* So companioned with the call came the Promise. It was no fool's errand on which Abraham was setting out. His destiny was not to be like that of some rivers I have seen in the western country, starting in

* Gen. xii. 1, 3.

their pilgrimage of refreshing and flowing on for many a mile, and then sinking down exhausted and coming to nothing in the sands. His life was not to be all sacrifice. He was not commanded to that fearful march from country, from kindred, from father's house for naught. With the rugged notes of the call was mingled the music of a Promise. He was to sacrifice, but sacrifice was only a rougher path to a smooth and shining end; out of its thorns was to blossom a better destiny than Abraham otherwise could possibly have gained. It was not all cross for Abraham, it was crown too, and the cross was but the ladder, climbing up which, he should reach and wear the crown. He was not to remain a simple Bedouin chief, captain of a clan; he was to become the father of a mighty nation, and was to fling abroad the richest blessings on other nations too. But, between the little chieftainhood and the grand fatherhood stood sacrifice; but also arm-in-arm with sacrifice, like the stars shining out of the night, stood Promise; and strength for the sacrifice was to come out of faith in the Promise.

What was true for Abraham, is just as true for you and me. There comes to us no call of God how rough and heavy soever its yoke may seem, that is not cushioned too with Promise, that does not point onward and upward from itself to some vast and burdened blessing which otherwise we could not gain. You must yield a bad habit; yes, but in order that you may enter into a great self-mastership. You must endure chastisement—a cradle emptied, a bright hope darkened, a pain which must keep up its piercing, like that thorn in the flesh which would go on stabbing the apostle so; yes, but in order that it may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to you being exercised thereby. You must be crucified with Christ; yes, but in order that you may reign with Christ. You must renounce the world; yes, but in order that you may have Heaven. Christianity is not all cross; it is some crown—and a good deal of crown. “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,” declares the apostle. Married to the ruggedest duty is the Promise of

blessing always. It was so to Abraham ; it is so to you and me. *Cross and Crown* is your complete symbol of Christianity. Let us remember this amid our toilful waiting lives, and get hope and take courage.

Only this is also to be said : The stringent jagged call sounds in the present ; the Promise coming with it points to the future. *Now*, the weary way across the desert sands, with country, kindred, father's house resolutely left ; there—in the future, after the desert journey—there in Canaan, that is to say, in the region of accomplished duty, and also when God shall think it best, *then and there*, the shadowy Promise turned into substance by fruition.

And the energy to do the duty, the strength to bear the burden, to be found where ? Why, as I just now said, it is to be found here ; it can be found nowhere else, this is where it is to be found, in faith in the Promise.

Well, Abraham yields to the call, and puts faith in the Promise, and goes on and enters Canaan. He has now been several years in Canaan. Abraham was a childless man when he made his sacrifice and set out on that com-

manded journey. He had been always childless; and he was by no means a young man at the time of his setting out. He was seventy-five years old, and Sarah his wife was sixty-five. Up to that time he had never once listened to the music of the voice of his own child. Never once had his tent been rendered joyful by a child's prattle. Never once had he felt the dear weight of his own child upon his knee. He was way on past maturity also. He was not an old man, as we should call it—for people lived a great deal longer then than they do now; but he was not by any means a young man. He had passionately desired children; everybody did then. At least in this respect those were better times than these in which we live. Sarah thought it a terrible reproach that she was never mother. But with the call comes the Promise of a child—dimly at first, but really. Of Abraham is to be made a great nation, God says. This can only be as Abraham shall become a father and Sarah a mother. I am sure this promise must have been a great comfort to Abraham and to Sarah. There was sweet solace in it to them as they toiled on in the

long and difficult way toward the country, in which their lives were to be so enriched with the fulfillment of their deep desires.

But they have reached the land together now, and their tent is just as silent and empty as it has always been. They have stayed in the land for several long years, and still their tent is voiceless of a child. They have been much blessed in other ways. Abraham was a prosperous man when he set out; he is a man much more prosperous now. "And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold," the Scripture tells us. He has become a very mighty chieftain, too, in those years, and a successful warrior as well.

After his kinsman Lot had made that bad choice of his, and had gone to live in Sodom, the city had been captured by the kings of cities in another portion of the country, chiefly under the command of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations. Lot had been captured also with all his property, and had been carried off. When Abraham hears of it, he arms three hundred and eighteen of his own drilled servants, and, following the capturers

way up northward into the neighborhood of Dan, he skillfully falls upon them in a night surprise, and rescues all the booty, and his brother Lot as well.*

Abraham is a person held, too, in very great repute. His name and position are most honorable. When he returns from this daring and successful expedition, Melchizedek, king of Salem, and priest of the most high God, comes forth to congratulate him, and to bless him publicly, bringing him bread and wine.†

Every way and on every side the best things seem to come to Abraham, except the one special thing which he desires most of all, and which is absolutely essential to lift him into the high destiny God has promised him. He is still childless. His tent is just as silent and as empty as it ever was.

I think, too, Abraham must have been just now in a despondent reaction after a great strain. The anxiety about Lot and that military expedition had tasked him terribly. He had been successful; but he had been obliged

* Gen. xiv.

† Gen. xiv. 17-20.

to pay the price of success, just as you and I must, if we would ever reach any—namely, the price of thought, and skill, and toil. Abraham did not blunder into his success any more than you or I can. And because Abraham was a man just like any one of us, he was under the usual law that after any great strain and expenditure, reaction must set in. And amid the nervelessness of such reaction, even our success is apt to look strangely dimmed and our disappointments are apt to grow very large, and to cast exceedingly dark shadows over our success. And, also, I am quite sure that this gloomy mood was increased in Abraham by the fear that these kings whom he had just now vanquished would reorganize, and come down upon him in strong attack.

I think all this, because the word of God, which just now comes to him, seems to be a word exactly answering to just such a mood as this.

After these things—after all this fighting and strain, and amid all this fear, the word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying : “ Fear not, Abraham : I am thy shield, and thy

exceeding great reward.”* Just the sort of comfort a man in such a plight would need, you see—that God would guard him round, and that God would lift him up.

And now right here, in this familiar intercourse with God, the great trouble of Abraham's heart and life comes out. It is very easy to picture him to ourselves. Here he is, a man who has sacrificed a great deal and done a great deal through faith. This has been sustaining him all along—making him the nobly obedient man he was; this Promise that out of his hard sacrifice, and out of his weary wanderings, God is going to bring glory to His own name and blessing to himself and others, through making him a great nation, and therefore through the giving him a child. But he has watched and waited for years; and now, in this time of gloom, the whole thing begins to look very misty and uncertain to him. He tells his thoughts boldly to God—just as you and I should in our daily prayers. God is Father, and fathers are not angry when their

* Gen. xv. 1.

children tell their troubles to them. And Abraham said: "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the possessor of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and behold a son of my house is mine heir." And then there follows a reiteration of the Promise on the part of God in more distinctive shape than it had worn before: "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."*

And then the Lord illustrates the glory of this Promise to him. He takes him out under the solemn stars and bids him look aloft. Travelers tell us that we know nothing of the beauty of the starry night in this Western land of ours. Far away in the wilderness of the Northwest, up amid the mountains, where the atmosphere is very dry and very clear, I think I have seen faintly what Abraham saw so fully on that ancient night. The stars there look not like shining flatnesses plastered on to the night, but like golden globes hung in the ether.

* Gen. xv. 2, 4.

You can see way behind them as your eye follows on and on into the infinite spaces; and more of them, too, appear. The Oriental sky is wonderful in this regard, men who have seen it say—as to its splendor, as to the immense number of the brilliant spheres.

“Look up,” God said to Abraham. “Canst thou tell the stars to number them? So shall thy seed be.”*

Then God ratified this Promise in solemn and symbolic covenant with Abraham—entered into engagement with him that He would keep His word by the cloven goat and ram, and by the birds, and in the horror of a great darkness, but illumined by the smoking furnace and the burning lamp.† And Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness. The strengthened faith of Abraham took hold of the Promise with a fresh grasp. He was strong again. His heart was comforted. It should all be surely as God had said. He would believe on and wait God’s time. So Abraham goes on into the new life of this great faith.

* Gen. xv. 5.

† Gen. xv. 9, 17.

It is a great thing when a husband and wife are united in the same faith. It is a great thing when they stand in equal faith, and so together pass forward into the uncertain years. Usually when a man and wife are believing people, it is the wife who is the more so. It is she who gets the firmest hold upon the divine Promises. It is she who rests on them the more utterly. It is she who, by many a faithful word and by the serene example of her trust, gives heart to the husband's failing courage; gives swiftness to his more laggard steps. It was not so with Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was more a man of faith than Sarah was a woman of it. A childless waiting, even after this second manifestation of the Promise, had shredded the faith of Sarah quite away, at least as far as her own concernment in the Promise went. They had now been together ten long years in the land that God had showed them, and still the fulfillment of the Promise was withheld. I quote just here another's words: "Nature and history prompted the union of one man to one wife in marriage, and it might have been presumed that God would honor His own institution.

But the history of the creation of man was forgotten or unheeded, and the custom of the East prompted Sarah to resort to the expedient of giving her maid to her husband for a second wife." And Abraham, instead of being led on in the right way by his wife, was led off in the wrong way by her.

We will not wait to tell of all the pain and shame which came to Abraham and to Sarah from this false step. How, even though Ishmael came into the tent, discord came with him! How jealous Sarah grew, and then how cruel. How the mother and the babe were sent to wander in the wilderness; and how the wrong deed perpetuated itself, even in the very character of Ishmael, who became a wild man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against his—a kind of incarnation of the wayward faithless wrong out of which he sprung.

From the time of that second manifestation of the Promise, and the ratification of it, full fourteen years have sped away. Ishmael has been born, but Ishmael is not the promised seed. Still Abraham's tent is empty of the

true heir. I think Abraham had fallen into a lower sort of life since he had gone off in the wrong way. I suppose he tried to be content with Ishmael ; thought that God would only half fulfill His word ; that the full, clear glory of it was not to be expected, and that he must content himself with the son of a bondwoman for his heir. That is the way a great many Christians live. They do not think that God means all He says. Possibly, He may mean half, but never all to *them* anyway. They must get on as best they can, with a little joy and a little peace, and be very thankful for that little, and never hope that they can have much more. I think it must have been in some such way as this that Abraham lived through these fourteen years, being quite content with Ishmael, perhaps in a dull way, and thinking that he was all God had for him.

And then God comes to break in upon him with another and better word of Promise still—He comes to him announcing for Himself a new name now, El-Shaddai—God Almighty—the God with whom nothing is impossible. Abraham, He says, I am the Almighty God ;

walk before me, and be thou perfect—that is, sincere in faith, upright. And then the Promise is again renewed—in terms most unmistakable. Abraham is to have a son, and Sarah is to be its mother. Ah, God's thoughts for us are always greater than our thoughts of Him. You see during all these fourteen years of contentment with Ishmael, Abraham has not been gaining faith—he has been losing it. So when God makes this grand, distinct announcement, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed. Some think it was the laugh of joy. I think it may have been quite as likely the semi-incredulous laugh of a kind of faithless wonder, for this was what he was thinking in his heart: Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!* And yet there is still faith in Abraham, that *is* undermost. Now once more in the presence of the Promise, it rises up and grasps it. God writes His Promise now in the new name which He confers. Heretofore Abra-

* Gen. xvii. 17, 18.

ham has been Abram, that is, high father; now he is to wear the name of Abraham,* that is, father of a great multitude; and his wife, who had been called Sarai, that is, strife, contention, is now to wear the name of Sarah, that is, princess.† Also a fresh engagement on the part of God is entered on, which Abraham is to ratify by circumcision.‡

How long after this it was I know not, probably not very long, and God makes new statement of His Promise still, this time in the ear of Sarah. Abraham is sitting in his tent-door one day amid the heats of noon. Three men stand by him suddenly. With true, quick Oriental courtesy and hospitality Abraham welcomes them, and invites them to tarry for refreshment. The meal is hastily prepared. Then one of them, who is spokesman and seems to be the peculiar representative of Jehovah, declares to Abraham that Sarah, his wife, shall have a son. As is the Oriental custom, Sarah is not present with the guests. She

* Gen. xvii. 5.

† Gen. xvii. 15.

‡ Gen. xvii. 12.

has retired behind a curtain of dark camel's-hair cloth, but she is near enough to hear the conversation; and the announcement, she remembering her age, causes her to break forth in a laugh of incredulity. To use another's words, "Through the curtained doorway of the tent that low laugh was noticed by the disguised representative of the Almighty Promiser, who having condescended to become man's friend, will not disdain to mingle in the conversation of men or to meet their foibles with appropriate remonstrance. Wherefore did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for Jehovah?—were not words directly spoken to the woman, but they answered her secret mood. They shook her out of her flippant skepticism. They wrought a sudden alternation of shame and fear within her breast. She tried to cover unbelief with denial, speaking out loudly from the recess of the curtained tent: 'I laugh not.' Unseen though she was behind her curtain, the next brief and final word was addressed to her. It was the first word, so far as we know, ever spoken by superhuman lips to Sarah. It was to be the last. Upon her heart it left a painful reminder

of her sin in doubting God's merciful and powerful interposition in her history, as well as of His All-knowledge and All-mightiness with whom she had to do. 'Nay, but thou didst laugh.' What wonder if Sarah disbelieved no longer."*

So one day, though Abraham's years had numbered now a century, and though the years had sadly stricken Sarah too, the child of Promise was born into the Patriarch's tent. It was full a quarter of a century from the time of that first Call and Promise. But how perfectly does the Promise turn to fulfillment at the last. They named him Isaac—that is, Laughter—not the laughter of faithlessness, of unbelieving amazement, but the deep, thankful Laughter of wondering religious joy, that God would keep His Promise even to such faith as theirs.

And this was the cradle-song which Sarah sung above her babe:

"Laughter hath God prepared for me,
All who hear of it will laugh with me.

* "Abraham the Friend of God," by Dr. Dykes, page 178.

Who would have said to Abraham,
Sarah giveth to children suck ?
For a son have I born to him in his old age."*

O discouraged one and troubled, let this light gather on the cloud for thee. God keeps His Promise to the last letter. The vision may tarry ; wait for it. Thou shalt surely see it.

O discouraged one and troubled, God keeps His Promise even to such failing, imperfect, wavering faith as this.

O discouraged one and troubled, I know what thou sayest : Abraham had word from God, speaking out of the sky, gleaming in some vision on which his faith could grip. That I have not. Nay, but thou hast. The Bible is full of Words from God.

O discouraged one and troubled, I know what again thou sayest : Abraham had sure covenant and engagement with his God that He would make true His word. That I have not. Nay, but thou hast. The Blood of Christ is the Seal of the Covenant.

O discouraged one and troubled, let me warn

* Gen. xxi. 6, 7.

thee: do not do wrong that thou mayest the more quickly win the Promise—Ishmael did not bring Abraham blessing.

O discouraged one and troubled, be not content with any Ishmael when God will give thee Isaac.

CHAPTER V.

DIFFICULT DUTY—THE WAY OUT—THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.

“THE surest way to know our gold is to look upon it and examine it in God’s furnace, where He tries it for that end, that we may see what it is. If we have a mind to know whether a building stands strong or no, we must look upon it when the wind blows. If we would know whether that which appears in the form of wheat has the real substance of wheat, or be only chaff, we must observe it when it is winnowed. If we would know whether a staff be strong, or a rotten, broken reed, we must observe it when it is leaned on, and weight is borne upon it. If we would weigh ourselves justly, we must weigh ourselves in God’s scales, that He makes use of to weigh us.”*

* Edwards on the Religious Affections; Works, Vol. III., page 210.

True words these of Jonathan Edwards, true for you and me, true for Abraham as well, back there among the dim shadows of the beginning of human history. Such words are the statement of a divine law for life. And it is this law, which, throwing its great circle round Abraham as well as round ourselves, brings his distant life into nearness to our own, rendering it companionable with helpfulness: this law, namely, that that life is the only valuable one which is the tested life, and which stands the test.

And it came to pass after these things*—after all this previous history and experience. Abraham had looked into the stony face of trial and felt the threshings of its flail many times before—when he must endure that wrench from country, kindred, father's house; when the selfishness of his kinsman Lot must make the knife of separation cut more deeply still; when anxiety for Lot because of his captivity must pull at his heart-strings and draw him into the venture of a military expedition; when the

* Gen. xxii. 1.

years must slowly gather till they made a quarter of a century before the promise should tardily burst into the blossom of fulfillment, and his tent grow musical with Isaac's prattle. And yet, after all these things—and the reception of their various culture of firmness, and faith, and hope, testing was not done with him. He must meet now a trial, compared with which all these which were past and gone were but as summer zephyrs to the Euroclydon which caught the ship in which the Apostle sailed, and when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared.

The strange, pathetic story—strangest and saddest in any literature—most singular and sad of any incident in the whole Bible.

The hope deferred, which for so long had sickened the heart of Abraham, had now risen on his life like the coming of the sun. The faith which had waited for a quarter of a century was blessed now, and burdened with fruition. Here in his tent, in the sweet talk of the boy about his knee, in his growing strength of limb and strength of mind, in his beautiful youthhood, in the satisfying companionship of his fair, fresh man-

hood—for Isaac had now reached about the age of twenty-seven years—had been yielded tangible and wonderful proof that, when God promised, His promises were yea and verily. Abraham could now see how he was to become the father of a mighty nation. Abraham could now see how in him all nations of the earth were to be made blessed. Rightly named Isaac, Laughter—that young man. He was sunshine to his father's heart. He was interpretation to all the mystery of his sacrifice and wandering. He was the child of the Covenant. He was the bridge over which the best boons of God were to march onward into the far-off years. What hopes made halo for his head. What freight of the Divine Verity did he not carry. What peaceful stars did he not hang amid the shadows of the Patriarch's declining years!

And there—right there; and then, just then; the stern, agonizing trial broke and fell. And it came to pass after these things God did tempt Abraham.* Pour the right meaning in-

* Gen, xxii, 1.

to that word tempt. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God can not be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."* True, but God does try men, He does put men to the test. That is the meaning here. And it came to pass after these things that God did put Abraham to the test. That He did do. That He will do to you and me as well. And this was the awful shape which Abraham's supreme testing took. "Take thou thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest."† Do you mark—what else shall I call it?—the terrific aggravation of those words: Take now thy *son*—not thy bullocks and thy lambs, not thy servant, no, not the steward of thine house, that shall not serve the turn; thine *only* son—not Ishmael, he is not thy son by thine own wife Sarah, he has been started on a different destiny, he is not in the line of the promises;—Isaac—yes, he who is the sweet Laughter of thy soul—Isaac, *whom thou lovest*, —take *him* and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer *him* there for a burnt-offering upon one

* James i. 13.

† Gen. xxii. 2.

of the mountains which I will tell thee of.* Was there ever sterner test? Was there ever discipline more jagged and more cruel? I am sure Abraham must have felt as we have often amid the stress of our trials, anything but that. Not thus, O Lord, not thus—how often do we say it, wither any bloom but this which Thy providential blight is striking, touch me in any other point than this. But to be tried, as I am tried, O Lord, it cuts my heart in twain and lets my life flow out; bruise me if Thou must bruise me—but not thus, not thus.

And yet one of the wonders of this story is the instant obedience which Abraham rendered. The Scriptures tell us nothing of the struggle. They speak only of the quick action of the bleeding but submissive heart. And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up and *went* unto the place of which God had told him.† There were three days of journeying as brimmed with

* Gen. xxii. 2.

† Gen. xxii. 3.

sorrow as days could be. Then at last the fatal place was nearly reached. Then the young men are left, and Abraham goes yonder with his boy to do the worship which is to crush out his heart. It seems to me that I can see the trembling of Abraham's hand as he burdens Isaac with the wood for the burnt-offering—true type of Him who fainted beneath the burden of His Own Cross on the Via Dolorosa along the way toward Calvary. I think I can see the fearful sadness written on that father's face as he goes climbing on carrying the fire and the knife.

When your heart has been filled to bursting, and you have felt as though you must lose all self-control and lie down and die, have you never found your burden made heavier yet by some artless, unintended word which somebody has spoken at your side? So I think it must have been with Abraham when Isaac so unconsciously asked the wondering question: My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?* What could Abraham do? What can any of

* Gen. xxii. 7.

us do when we are utterly desolate, but fall back on God. He answered, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. So they went both of them together.

Well, the appropriate place is reached. Abraham builds the altar there. He lays the wood in order. He takes his own son Isaac for the sacrificial Lamb. He binds him as they used to bind the bullocks devoted for an offering. He lays him on the altar upon the wood. He stretches forth his hand and grasps the knife to strike it even into Isaac's heart. O mystery of Providence, which could command a thing like that!

And then—there is the voice of the Angel of the Lord calling : Abraham, Abraham ! Here am I, is the steady answer; the same reply as that when first the testing smote him. O Evangel sweet with Heaven's music ; O beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning ; the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; O radiant noon breaking upon midnight ; O reward of faith, whose grappling anchor flukes no tempest can wrench away ! “ Lay not thine hand upon the lad ; neither do thou anything

unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.”* And then the ram caught in the thicket there, close by, in the nick of time, for the burnt-offering. And Abraham’s joyful exclamation, Jehovah jireh—the Lord will provide.† And then—the blessing, brighter, weightier, than even Abraham had ever known before—the Oath of Jehovah; By myself have I sworn, that in blessing I will bless thee; and in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, as the sand upon the sea-shore; and all the Heaven of Peace which filled the tried but faithful soul.

Such is the Scripture story of this surprising and tremendous testing.

But do you find no difficulty in it, do you ask me? Can you make it all clear to yourself that God should even seem to command a thing like that?

I reply very frankly, I do find great difficulty in it. I can not see white light through every part of it. That God should

* Gen. xxii. 12.

† Gen. xxii. 14.

even seem to command Abraham to murder his own son, even in the way of worship, is, I confess to you, a difficulty to me. But though I can not see through it *all*, I can see through it *some*; and what I do see is very close to my own life and mightily helpful to me.

How much it takes to make a grape-cluster —long roots striking down into the earth; broad leaves opening a million mouths for light and rain and air; branches along which are borne, like water from distant fountains along aqueducts, the juices which the roots and leaves have manufactured in the darkness beneath, in the light above. But more than this: behind the roots and leaves, which can be seen and touched, are secrets which science has never yet unraveled. How do root and leaf elaborate the juices? how is the trunk wrapped round each season with its larger covering of woody fiber? what forces lift the sap, in defiance of gravitation, from the buried rootlet way up to the topmost twig? You know these mysteries are present in the grape-vine. You can not get your grape-cluster without their co-operation. But you will eat your cluster and

thank God for it, though you may not be quite able to explain the meaning and the method of its growth.

I have thought it thus with this story of Abraham's testing. It *is* a cluster hanging on the Scripture vine. There are some things about it very difficult to explain. There are, however, other things about it easy of explanation and full of food for life. I think it wiser—is it not?—to pluck and eat the cluster, and wait perhaps for heaven's light to make the dark more clear.

But we may surely answer even now, concerning the darker side of this story, that it is within the category of a great many similar mysteries and not outside of them. We can not make it quite coincide with our notion of the Goodness and the Fatherhood of God that He should lay such requirement upon Abraham. True; but then the sorrow, misery, death, in the world to-day, how can we utterly adjust these with the Goodness and the Fatherhood of God? When you go through grave-yards and read the legends on the tombstones, the name, the birth, the death of a child, for instance; of

course you think, that is not all the tombstone covers—just the one buried there. God knows how many hopes were nailed into that coffin also; how some mother's heart wanders on like Rachel crying for her children, and can not be comforted. You go to the funeral, and say the very best words you can; and yet you know they can not reach the bottom of such grief. I was in a parlor once, and saw upon the wall a picture of a fair girl, drowned right in the beautiful blush of her girlhood; and the mother, they said, had never been the same woman since. God could have kept that mother's heart glad with her daughter. Why did He not? Ah, why? that is the question. When we search for answer, our lips are dumb. In a most real sense there often come commands to carry our Isaacs into the Mount of Sacrifice. There is a mighty sisterhood of mystery which this story of Isaac's sacrifice only shares. We must wait about a great many things for Heaven's light.

Then also, I get some help about the matter here. In His teaching of men, God always stoops to their present point of culture, that

He may lead them higher. He treats men just as parents do children in the nursery. And what are we, the topmost of us, but children in God's nursery? The mother seizes such knowledge as the child has reached already, though it be only the fragmentary, disjointed knowledge of a child, and uses that to build on into better. What fairy stories she tells! There are no fairies; but the child's imagination is the first faculty that wakes up; and so the mother seizes the fairy tale, and uses it to lead the child to fact. I think God treats men in some such way. Out of what they already know, out of what they already feel, He leads them into something better and nobler, through the use of the half-knowledge and the dim feeling which they have already.

Now the underlying thought and feeling of Abraham was surely right—something which he ought to be deeply taught, namely, that everything, even Isaac, ought to be surrendered to God.

With the thought of human sacrifices to Deity, Abraham was already familiar. They practiced it in Chaldea, where he came from. They practiced it in all the tribes among whom

he mingled while he went wandering about the promised land. What these did for their heathen gods, surely Abraham ought to be willing to do for his, the true God, the Maker of the heavens and the earth. So the command comes to him in the terms of the circumstances with which he is surrounded. He will do for his God what the heathen do for theirs. He makes the sacrifice in steady and deep intent. Then, when it is made, and he has given even Isaac up—has not withheld his son, his only son, from God—God, by the interposing voice of angel, and the provided ram, teaches him that He does *not* delight in human sacrifices ; leads him into a better thought and into a better way ; blesses him with truer knowledge of the God he serves ; tells him that all He desires is that He should really stand first and foremost ; that not even Isaac should get between his soul and the heavenly Father's face. This whole thing was the descent of God to the then culture of Abraham—that he might be lifted into nobler thoughts of God than that He should desire the blood of his only son. I get some help in this way.

But enough of trying to explain the mystery. What are the real lessons for to-day the story ought to teach us?

First. In His training of men, God uses Trial. God does not tempt men, the Devil does that; but God does try men.

Did you ever think that the one thing which God is after in this world is reality of character—gold, not gilding; diamond, not quartz? There is enough of profession in the world. There is enough of lip-service. There are plenty of fig-trees flaunting forth in leaves, but destitute of fruit. But it is not for these that God is seeking. They will not do among men even in the long run; they will never do for God. A character clear and crystallized about the absolute truth of things, this is the noblest product of God's hands. It is this which this world, with its hardnesses and disciplines, is intended, under the hand of God, to manufacture.

But nothing can be real and true except it be adjusted to the laws of its being. In a green-house some time ago, I saw a noble banana-tree full in foliage and blossoming into

fruitage; but it was in a green-house where the proper temperature and the right humidity for banana growth were kept. If you would grow bananas in this country, you must transplant the laws of their growing with them, or you kill them, that is all. There is much of egg-shell, newspaper, fashionable boarding-school culture in these days. But when the strain of life comes upon such culture, it smashes it as weights egg-shells. You can not have true culture except as you adjust training to the laws of mind; except you grasp principles, and push backward into causes, and exercise the faculties, until the victory of spontaneity is won.

What is true everywhere else is true for character. That can only be solid and substantial as it is built according to the law ordained for it. What now is the supreme law for character? In a word, this—that God is to be First. With Milton, we are to keep ourselves “as ever in our Great Task-master’s eye.” As the planets pay obeisance to the central sun, thoughts, desires, purposes, affections, are to pay obeisance to the central God. Wealth is real, and

prosperity is real, and social position is real, and friends are real, and children are real; but all are to be subordinated to the Infinite God, most real, most masterful. As Moses did, we are to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible."* We are not to say, My neighbors stretch the truth, and are deft in sleights of underhand-edness, and so succeed in business, therefore I may do it. We are not to say, The people in my set are liberal, even to wickedness; there-fore I may be. We are not to say, That church member is no better than he ought to be; therefore I may be no better than I ought to be. We are not to find our standards down-ward, we are to find them upward. More real than any thing within us or without us, God is to be imperial over thought and deed. God first—not tenth, fifth, third, or even sec-ond. God first—it is only as you build the house of character on such foundation that it can stand, though the great winds blow and beat, and the great rains fall. This is the law for character for you and me. This was its

* Heb. xi. 27.

law for Abraham. God must be more to him than Isaac even.

But it is the seen and the temporal which our hands grasp. We are much occupied with the visible; and amid its mists it is often difficult to make actual the Invisible. Business entralls. Friendships enchant. Worldly delights entice. Insensibly, almost, our hearts gather and fasten downward here, instead of pushing outward and upward there. We are selfish. We are worldly. We are intertwined with the seen and temporal. Isaac gets to be more than God.

Then God sets the knives of Trial playing among these lower things. Children die. Money takes to itself wings and flies away. Influence dries up like streams in droughts. We are stripped of everything but God. And then, like Job amid the potsherds, with only God to look to, God grows strangely real, and the sight of God imparts His reality to character.

In His training of men, God makes use of Trial. We must learn to put not Isaac first, but God.

Second. Learn from the story of this Testing

the true support in Trial. Somebody says : “ I have known a timid traveler—whose route lay across the higher Alps, on a path that, no broader than a mule’s foothold, skirted a dizzy precipice, where we saw the foaming river far below diminished to a silver thread—find it safest to shut her eyes, nor attempt to guide the course, or touch the bridle, where a touch were fatal, throwing the steed and rider over to bound from shelf to shelf and be dashed to pieces in the valley below. And there are times and circumstances when, to be saved from falling into sinful doubts, and even into blank despair, the believer must, if we may say so, shut his eyes, and committing his way to God, let the bridle lie on the neck of Providence, and walk not by sight, but faith. God, however things may look, has not forgotten to be gracious, nor is His mercy clean gone forever; and when we are walking in darkness and have no light, there is nothing for it but ‘to trust in the Lord and stay ourselves on God.’ ”

If you will turn to the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, you will find that

it was just this deathless, sightless trust in God which did hold Abraham steady amid this terrific testing. “By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.*

My friend, when there is no Mount Moriah in your vision; when the way of life is smooth and does not go climbing up some rocky height of sacrifice; when you may dwell in quietness within your tent and have all the hours filled so shinningly with the music of Isaac’s laughter —then you may not be so much affronted with the creed of those who tell you that after all the world is only a machine, and God is only a great machinist, who, having manufactured the concern and wound it up, has flung it off into the spaces with a carelessness that is infinite, to let it run on until it shall run down.

But when those awful Moriah summits do rise before you, as at some time or other they

* Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19.

surely will, those heights upon which you must build your altar, on which you must lay in dedication utter your heart's best treasure; O, then, how your heart will go pushing outward, upward, to grasp and keep the fact and feeling of a Close, Personal, Interfering, Almighty God. Faith in Him is the only thing which can keep you steady then. Faith in Him as the only one who can change the mount of Sacrifice into the mount Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide.

Third. Learn from the Scripture story of this Testing the truth, that Trial nobly borne is only a rough, but needful way into better blessing. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.* O that Afterward—how it is the harvest set upon the land which the plough has cut to pieces; how it is the harbor into which we sail when the buffeting waves have been overpast. Afterward—for Abraham what truer knowledge of Jehovah; what confirmation of

* Heb. xii. 11.

the promises even by the oath of God; what joy, receiving Isaac back from the dead even in a figure; what lifted faith in Him who now had thus become to him Jehovah Jireh—the Rescuing, the Providing God.

There was Perpetua. She was young; she was delicate; she was a mother. “Have mercy on thy babe,” they said to her. “Have mercy on the white hairs of thy father and the infancy of thy child.” “I will not,” she answered. “Art thou, then, a Christian?” they said; and she answered, “Yes.” “Then sentence was pronounced, and we were condemned to the wild beasts, and with hearts full of joy returned to our prison,” she says. *Condemned to the wild beasts, and with hearts full of joy returned to our prison.* Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide. If thou must really make the sacrifice, if thou must meet the savage beasts, while the thronging amphitheatre looks down applauding, then as thy day is shall thy strength be; there shall come to thee from God such surprising inner help that the beasts shall be but the rougher messengers opening the gates of thy reward.

I was reading lately of that young British soldier who told the chaplain-general of the British forces, that when on his first night in the barracks he knelt down to say his prayers, the others all laughed at him and flung their boots at him. The chaplain advised him to say his prayers in bed. Next time the chaplain met the soldier he asked him how his plan succeeded. "I did it for a night or two," the man replied, "but then I thought it looked like being ashamed of Jesus Christ; and I knelt down again to say my prayers by my bed, but none of the others laugh at me now. On the contrary, they kneel down themselves and say their own prayers." Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide. If thou art but true to God amid thy testing, He will make thy crosses blossom for thee into victorious crowns. Difficult duty—the way out? This is the way out—namely, the way in—trusting to the certain help of God to lead thee along that way, out into a larger place.

What Abraham need not do—that, constrained by surpassing love—our God *has* done. "For God so loved the world that He gave His

only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Must not His sacrifice, not stopping in intent, but moving from intent outward even to the nails and cry and gash of spear of Calvary, melt your heart into penitence and faith and love?

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE AND HOME.

GENESIS xxiv. 67.

THE twenty-fourth chapter of the Genesis, says a German commentator, "glows in all the freshness and fullness of a sacred Biblical idyl—the first pearl in that string of pearls, in the religious glorification of the human bridal state, which runs down through the wooing of Rachel by Jacob, the little book of Ruth, to its culmination in the Song of Songs."* Certainly the chapter is a most sweet and precious primæval picture. Nowhere else can you find a story more touching and more tender, and at the same time more exquisite in its literary finish. It is very full, too, of religious and wise suggestion about a subject very close to every

* Lange's Commentary.

one of us—marriage and home. For, much as the world has grown since that most ancient time when Abraham sent Eliezer on the long journey after a wife for his son Isaac, it has not outgrown the union of hearts and lives in marriage and the home which comes out of it.

But, before we go forward to thought about this special subject, I would like to have you notice another thing about this chapter in addition to the still, soft beauty of it.

Bishop Watson tells us : “ An authentic book is that which relates matters of fact as they really happened.” Now the Bible is such an authentic book. What it tells you it tells truly, according to the facts. Its history is a real history. And the argument for the truth of the whole Bible, from its authenticity, is a very strong one—an argument which all the researches in Eastern lands are constantly making stronger still. The argument is this : if the Bible is so authentic, so close to facts in matters of historical detail ; if it can be so utterly trusted here, if all research only increases the reason for our trust in it here, certainly we have right to trust it in all its parts : certainly

so true in these matters, it must be as true in other matters.

That it may be seen how authentic, and so how true, the Bible is in this chapter, I would like to quote you a passage from the "Land and the Book," by Mr. Thompson. Mr. Thompson has been very long a resident in the Holy Land, and in that country fashions and customs do not change. They are something fastened, remaining, stereotyped.

Mr. Thompson says, talking about this very chapter : "The preparation and outfit for this journey agree in all respects with the persons concerned, the nature of the country, and the habits of the people. Eliezer took the camels loaded with provisions and presents; and such an expedition would not now be undertaken from Hebron with any other animals, nor with less number. Such a journey is both long and dangerous, far beyond what is indicated to a Western reader by the brief statement that Eliezer arose and went into Mesopotamia."

"Every phrase of the eleventh verse contains an allusion to matters Oriental. Arrived at the town of Nahor, he made his camels kneel

down without the city by a well of water, at the time of evening—the time that women go out to draw water. He made the camels kneel—a mode of expression taken from actual life. The action is literally kneeling; not stooping, sitting, or lying down on the side, like a horse, but kneeling on his knees; and this the camel is taught to do from his youth. The place is said to have been by a well of water, and this well was outside the city. In the East, where wells are scarce, and water indispensable, the existence of a well or fountain determines the site of a village. The people build near it, but prefer to have it outside the city, to avoid the noise, dust, and confusion always occurring at it, and especially if the place is on the public highway. It is around the fountain that the thirsty traveler and the wearied caravan assemble; and if you have become separated from your own company, before arriving at a town, you need only inquire for the fountain, and there you will find them."

"The time was evening; but it is further stated that it was when the women go forth to draw water. True to life again. At that hour

the peasant returns home from his labor, and the women are busy preparing the evening meal, which is to be ready at sunset. Cool fresh water is then demanded, and, of course, there is a great concourse about the well. But why limit it to the women? Simply because such is the fact. About great cities men often carry water, both on donkeys and on their own backs; but in the country, women only go to the well or fountain; and often, when traveling, have I seen long files of them going and returning with their pitchers, 'at the time when women go out to draw water.'"

"The description of Rebekah, the account she gives of herself, and the whole dialogue with Eliezer, agree admirably with Oriental customs. Even the statement as to the manner of carrying her pitcher, or rather jar, is exact—on her shoulder. The Egyptian and the Negro carry on the head; the Syrian on the shoulder or the hip. She went down to the well; and nearly all the wells in the East are in wadies (valleys), and many of them have steps down to the water. Eliezer asks water to drink; she hastens and lets down the pitcher

on her hand. How often have I had this identical act performed for myself, when traveling in this thirsty land. Rebekah emptied her pitcher into the trough—an article always found about wells, and frequently made of stone. The jewels also for the face, forehead, and arms are still as popular among the same class of people as they were in the days of Abraham. The camels, as appears from the thirty-second verse, were brought into the house, and I have often slept in the same room with these peaceful animals. Finally, the behavior of Rebekah, when about to meet Isaac, was such as modern etiquette requires. It is customary for both men and women, when an Emeer, or great personage is approaching, to alight some time before he comes up with them. In a word, this Biblical narrative is so natural to one familiar with the East, so beautiful also and life-like, that the entire scene seems to be an affair in which he himself has but recently been an actor."*

So you see how authentic the Bible is—how

* "The Land and the Book," Vol. 2, pages 403-406.

true about even such slight matters. Certainly the argument is a strong and concluding one; if so true in such touches and details, then true in all, and true throughout.

It is, however, of Marriage and of an opening Home of which this chapter tells. It is about these our thoughts must mainly gather. Let us look together into this Scripture and listen for a little to its beneficent suggestions about such important facts of life.

This is the first suggestion : Here was a marriage consummated under the full and hearty sanction of the parents on both sides.

I think it very touching to read how anxious Abraham was for the welfare of his son in his marriage. I am sure the relation between Isaac and his mother Sarah must have been very tender, very close, and absorbing. He had been the child of her old age, when she had given up the hope of ever having any child. It was Isaac who had cleaned from her the reproach which all Oriental women very keenly feel when they are denied children. Then, too, Isaac was in the line of God's promise, and was substantial proof that God would keep His

promise to the last letter, however improbable it might seem that the promise could come true. Then, too, what mother's hopes and mother's pride gathered round and centered in that boy! How he was to carry on the family until it widened into a mighty nation. How through him and through his descendants the promised blessing was at last to shine upon the earth. Certainly Isaac was very sweet and satisfying Laughter to his mother's heart. Certainly her love brooded him, as on quiet summer nights the dew gently broods the thirsty flowers. And Isaac answered to all this mother's love and care so utterly, that for long years, as far as we can find out, he never thought of marriage. It was enough for him that he had his mother.

But Sarah had been dead now for something like three years. The death-shadow came into Abraham's tent at last, just as it will surely come into your home and mine. Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; but the longest day gets to its sun-setting. And Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah for a tomb in which to lay his dead. This chapter closes with a very pathetic sentence: "And Isaac

was comforted after his mother's death." Rebekah began to take a little the mother's place. The three years' steady mourning began to dry its tears somewhat, now that Rebekah had appeared. Isaac was a quiet, clinging, tenacious sort of man. He was disposed to melancholy. His mother's death had gathered constant shadows round him. It was Abraham who proposed and dispatched the embassy for a wife for Isaac. And we may be sure that Abraham warmly welcomed Rebekah when she came, and rejoiced when the shadows began to roll away from his son's heart in the sunshine of her presence.

And if we turn to Rebekah's side of the house, we find that the welcome to this marriage was just as cordial there. "And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister; be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them."*

* Gen. xxiv. 59.

Now certainly all this was as it ought to be. When two young hearts, standing in equal pledge, put their feet upon the threshold opening into their united life, it is certainly better, it is certainly the thing that ought to be, that they be garlanded by the sympathy and overshadowed by the benediction of the parents' hearts and hands.

Sometimes, I grant, the marriage must begin without such sanction. I will affirm that the sacredest thing in this wide world, more sacred even than a parent's sanction, is the discovery and union in each other and to each other of two loving hearts. Sometimes there are cross-grained and unwise parents, who, for no reason except that he or she is not rich enough, or not in high position enough, refuse their sanction, and seek to interfere with the wise selections of a holy love. Well, then, the only thing for true hearts to do, is in God's name to stand true: and at the right age, and with wise forecast, and with sufficient certainty of their own feelings through tests of time, and with deep trust in God, to pass out into life together even under such a shadow as that of a withheld

parental sanction. But I am very thoroughly persuaded that while such instances are common enough in novels, they are very uncommon in actual life.

I grant again, that sometimes a marriage must begin without such parental sanction, because such sanction ought to be resolutely withheld. Parents are wiser than their children, usually ; they have lived longer. If the child of your love—whether it be boy or girl—is determined on alliance with worthlessness, with a mere and miserable prettiness, with bad and dissipated habits, with utter irreligion, then you ought as parents, as far as possible, to withhold your sanction and interfere. And any young man or young woman, blessed with a good father and a good mother, who is conscious that the parental blessing must be withheld because of such reasons as I have mentioned, had better take counsel of wiser heads and of older and stronger hearts, and beware, and refuse to get clasped into such a marriage. The refusal of the parents' sanction to such a marriage ought to be the voice of God against it. For the immense preponderance of proba-

bilities, the almost certainty, is that such a marriage will be a sowing to the wind and the reaping of the whirlwind. O the harbor which a true marriage opens; it is home—that word of all we speak which is likest heaven. O the wreck which a false marriage causes the life; it is wreck the most utter, the most desperate, the most remediless. And if, young man, young woman, the parental heart—because of evil habits, looseness of life, want of moral earnestness, a mere glitter of external and superficial grace or pleasantness—warn you lovingly of such a wreck, be advised in time, stop; make no such marriage as that must be.

Other things being equal, that is the marriage which holds the best promise of the blessed life which starts one with the fairest measure of the heartiest parental sanction. It is such sanction which young people should in the deepest way desire.

There is still another thing I want to say just here: I am sure the mightiest safety which can stand about young people, when at last the day comes, and they must make for themselves this most momentous choice of marriage, I am

sure that the thickest-walled safety which can be built around them for such a time, is such a method of parental training that, at that balancing critical time, children shall stand in the true and right relation to their parents.

I was rejoicing some time since with a young father and mother over the babe that God had given them. What a little thing it was; and yet they said—and I have no doubt that what they said is true—it was a babe most wonderful. What now is the relation in which that baby wonder begins to stand toward parenthood? Why, it stands utterly and thoroughly in the relation of dependence. It is altogether in that relation. It hangs for everything upon parenthood; and that relation shall maintain itself for a long time as the years go on. As the little creature climbs up into higher and broadens out into wider life, it must still do it in this relation of dependence. Feeling, thought, culture of every sort, must come to it largely through parental ministry. It shall get its idea of God as it thinks of Him under the image of the greater Parent. It shall find edge for its conscience as it sees the discrimination of the

parent between right and wrong. It shall learn the meaning of law and of subjection as it pays obedience to the parents' will. For a long time to that child the parents must stand for everything.

But, you know that the fruit grows looser upon the stem as it gets on toward ripening. By and by another relation shall begin to obtrude upon and usurp this relation of dependence—namely, the relation of independence. The child begins to think for itself, reason for itself, judge for itself. There rises within itself the consciousness of its own free personality. It begins more and more to assert itself, and it ought to. It is God's law. The child gathers the reins of authority from the hands of the parent, takes them into its own, and begins to guide and manage its life for itself.

Now, just here, as it seems to me, is the critical time and passage for parental training. I have known parents who were caught in vast surprise when there came this inevitable period in their child's development. They could not understand it. They would not have it so. They screwed yet harder down the clamps of

their authority. And what was the consequence? The child openly rebelled and the happy home-life was broken up. Or, if not that, while there might be an outward submission to authority, there was an inward hatred of it and a practice against it when the parent's back was turned; and so there was given to the young nature the twist of a bad deceit and the evil sound of hollowness. The parent now, at this awful but necessary turn in the child's life, had but one hand to extend to it—the hand of authority. There ought to have been another hand stretched out—the hand of companionship. For blessed as is the relation of the dependence of childhood upon parenthood—the sign of which is authority—more blessed is the relation of a self-centered, self-controlling, noble independence toward parenthood—the sign of which is companionship.

O if at this time in the child's development, when questions must be decided for itself, when the voice of its own conscience must be heard, when it must feel the weight of moral responsibilities pressing upon the shoulders of its own fully formed personality; when it for itself

must choose its way, and no longer may follow in the way appointed by another; O if then the parent be only ready to recognize the real and changed relation of the child; if the voice of command do but take to itself the tone of a loving and wise advice; if there widen no dreary chasm between the child's heart and the parent's heart; if the child but feel itself wrapped about by the atmosphere of a warm, soliciting, tender, interpreting companionship;—then with what triple safety is that child guarded; then, how into the parent's ear will be whispered confidingly its shyest and most secret thoughts; then, when thoughts of marriage begin to stir, as stir they surely will, and the young heart knows not if it be not caught by some other young heart which seems to mate it: then at this time, filled with tremulous delight, and yet misty with the shadows of great danger,—how will there be no concealment, no mean and miserable management, no deceiving silences and conscience-damaging denials; but how, yearningly and frankly, will the dear advice of the companion parent be sought and listened to and heeded, and how

immensely unlikely will it be that that child will stand upon a marriage threshold which may not be festooned and wreathed around, and with the most fragrant and blooming parental sanction.

I think that a most beautiful picture in this chapter, Isaac and Rebekah going to each other, under the utmost blessing of the homes they leave to make their own. God grant it may be yours, young people, to have it when you marry. God grant it may be ours, who are parents, to give it when our children go.

But will you be kind enough to listen to a second suggestion concerning marriage, speaking to us out of this chapter. Here was a marriage promising blessing, because of the characters of those entering it.

That was the wisest possible prayer which Eliezer lifted heavenward, standing there by the well, outside the city of Nahor, and beseeching God's blessing on his embassy. "And he said: O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold I stand here by the well of water; and

the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also ; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac."* That was the wisest possible prayer. A maiden answering a test like that would surely be the helpfulest, noblest of wives.

For see—she must be a strong and healthful maiden to do a thing like that. Camels are enormous drinkers, and she had to go down to the well—down steps probably, and bear up the heavy water-jar upon her shoulder—and she must do it again and again until she had satisfied the thirst of the camels. She was no maiden whom a breath of air would smite; whom a slight walk would weary; who must be waited on as though she were a helpless infant; who was not good for much except to display the jewels which Eliezer gave her. She was a strong, grand damsel, with the full pulses

* Gen. xxiv. 12-14.

of a high health—able to do, able to lay her hands to things.

See again: She was of a generous and obliging disposition. Mr. Thompson, in his “Land and the Book,” says: “I have never found any young lady so generous as this fair daughter of Bethuel. She drew for all Eliezer’s camels, and for nothing, while I have often found it difficult to get my horse watered even for money.” I think these touches, telling of her quick adjustment to this unknown test, wonderfully beautiful, and evidence of a character as beautiful. How courteous she was to the stranger standing there: “Drink, my lord!” How gracious she was: “And she hasted and let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him drink.” How spontaneous she was in her readiness to serve: “I will draw water for thy camels, until they have done drinking.” How eager she was, and how kind-hearted, pitying the thirsty camels after their long march: “And she hasted and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.”

"And she was very fair to look upon," the record says. I do not wonder. I am sure so beautiful a nature must have fashioned a beautiful face.

One of the old Anglo-Saxon translations of the Bible calls the husband the weapon-man and the wife the web-man. He defends and supplies; she weaves in the home. Ah, yes! and she weaves the home itself as well. Home is most what she makes it. And I am sure it is easy enough to see that such politeness and courtesy and generosity and obligingness and sweet, swift readiness for service as Rebekah manifested here, must have been very radiant colors to get woven into Isaac's home.

Then, besides, she came of a religious family, that is, of as religious a family as there was then in the world, save Abraham's. Abraham's kinsmen there in Nahor, knew something at least of God. At any rate, they knew a great deal more of Him than did the daughters of the Canaanites; among whom Abraham dwelt. It was the chief thing which Abraham made Eliezer promise, that Isaac should not have one of these for wife. So I think it fair to say

that Rebekah shared with Isaac similarity of religious sentiment. She was not against him in this regard ; she was with him. She had had, in a certain sense at least, religious training. Her character had not been formed upon the heathen model. Well, now, that was a very beautiful character, bating some faults—of course Rebekah had faults, everybody has—that was a very beautiful character to build a home with—such vigorous health, such winning courtesy and readiness to serve, such mating of religious sentiment and feeling. So much for Rebekah. Only I would like to say also, I like that decision in her character. You will remember that after Eliezer had been accepted in his quest, and it was all settled that Rebekah was to be Isaac's wife, that her family wanted her to stay at least ten days longer with them. But Eliezer said : "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered me. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man ? And she said, I will go." It was a grand immediate giving of herself at once to him who was to be

her husband. There was no little fluttering unmeaning hesitancy, as though she did not know her mind. She knew it, and was ready for that which her decision might bring to her. It was a very *strong* character, that of Rebekah's, in addition, or perhaps better underneath its other graces. She was a woman you could count on. Thus Rebekah. And as to Isaac? We do not know so much of him in his younger years. But a young man who could love his mother so must have possessed very engaging qualities. And this also we know of him : he was pure, he was religious.

And what have I been going through all this for? For this reason, that you might the more clearly see the principle underlying it all ; namely, that it is the man and woman of the best and highest character who promise best for a happy marriage and a happy home. True words these which some one else has spoken : "The truest wedded life can only come out of the truest unwedded life. It is blank folly to imagine that a woman who has had half a dozen affairs of the heart, as they are called, can wed a man who has sown his wild oats, and make a

happy match of it. ‘Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall abide in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.’ You say, that means the merchant, and the politician, and the man and woman who would experience religion in the purest and loftiest sense. I say it means fitness for a true wedding, as certainly as any other thing we can think of. There is no reach in our life in which these great first things can be more essential, either for this world or the world to come. You can say it is seeing life. I say, it is seeing death. It is building a closet to hold a skeleton in the Holy of Holies.”* The best and truest characters make the truest marriage. It is for the man and woman, true as Rebekah was, and true as Isaac was *before marriage*, who shall enter into God’s best blessing of a happy home.

Will you receive a third suggestion, speaking to us out of this chapter, possibly a little anticipated in what I have just been saying?

* Robert Collyer.

Here was a marriage, and so a home, founded in religion.

I think it wonderful to notice how the whole building of this new home was wrapped about by prayer. It was in the most prayerful and religious spirit that Abraham determined on the sending of the embassy to bring a wife for his son Isaac.

Can you think of a more touching picture than that of the faithful old servant, Eliezer, standing there by the well's mouth, and not depending on his own skill and finesse, but first and foremost upon God, lifting up his heart there heavenward, that he might be led to her whom "Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac."

And then the blessing which Rebekah carried with her from her family was a prayer. And then that is a most beautiful and tender touch concerning Isaac. He first meets his wife amid his prayers. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes; and when she saw Isaac, she lighted

off the camel. And the servant said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."*

Dear young people, make your marriages as well in the presence of the Throne. Seek you there the leading of His Spirit, that you may find the one whom God hath appointed for His servant. Having found, bind your hearts together more closely still by the bond of prayer. And when you stand together on life's threshold, and enter your home together, kneel there in prayer together. Ask God to dwell in you by His Spirit for Jesus' sake. Ask Him to keep you in your love, in your joys, in your burdens.

Keep that prayer-altar lifted. Forget it not; neglect it not. You may front any future thus. And all the joys of life, and all its trials too,

* Gen. xxiv. 63-67.

shall but lead you into deeper, truer, more accordant marriage. And it shall surely sometimes seem to you as though a fragment of Heaven's glory had fallen down and broken shiningly upon your heads.

And, older people, you who are already married, and have possibly neglected hitherto to build your marriage and your home in prayer, begin now to do it. Even as did Lazarus, and Martha, and Mary there in Bethany, open your hearts and homes for the Lord's entrance. He will come. He will tarry with you. He will bring with Him better blessings for you than you have ever dreamed, as He did for them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE END.

“**A**ND all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years; and he died. And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died. And all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years; and he died. And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years; and he died. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years; and he died. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.”* “And these are the days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived,

* Gen. v.

an hundred threescore and fifteen years. - Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and he died."*

And so the end came at last, and certainly, even to those who tarried in the earth nearly a thousand years—even to Abraham, who waited here nearly two hundred, the end came.

You will have noticed that, long as his life was, the end smote Abraham much sooner than it did the group of patriarchs who lived before him.

It will smite you and me how swiftly sooner. There is between ourselves and these most ancient men, a similarity and a difference. The similarity—that as certainly as the End hove in sight for them, so certainly will it for you and me. The difference—that, at the very longest, our lives can be but as a handbreadth compared with theirs.

I have read somewhere that Professor Faraday adopted Flourins' physiological theory, that the natural age of man is one hundred years. The durability of man he believed to be measured by the time of growth. When once the

* Gen. xxv. 7.

bone, and that portion of the bone separated from the main portion of it by cartilage, become united, the body grows no more. In man this union is effected at twenty years. In the camel it takes place at eight; in the horse at five; in the lion at four; in the dog at two; in the rabbit at one. The natural termination of life is five removes from these several points. Man, being twenty years in growing, lives five times twenty years, that is one hundred; the camel is eight years in growing, and lives five times eight, that is forty years. The horse is five years growing, and he lives twenty-five years. The man who does not die of sickness, lives everywhere from eighty to one hundred years. Providence has given to man a century of life, but he does not attain it because he inherits disease; eats unwholesome food and permits vexations to disturb his equipoise. Life is to be divided into two equal halves, growth and decline; and these halves are to be again divided into infancy, youth, virility, and age. Infancy extends to the twentieth year; growth to the fiftieth, because it is during this period that the tissues become firm; virility from fifty

to seventy-five, during which the organism remains complete, and at seventy-five old age commences, to last a longer or a shorter time, as the diminution of reserved forces is hastened or retarded.

Such may be an ideal statement of the proper length of human life; but it is not a practical one.

Here is a practical statement furnished us by Bishop Burgess: "Ten thousand human beings set forth together on their journey. After ten years one-third at least have disappeared. At the middle point of the common measures of life, but half are still upon the road. Faster and faster, as the ranks grow thinner, they that remain till now become weary, and lie down and rise no more. At threescore and ten a band of some four hundred—nine thousand six hundred out of the ten thousand have departed—yet struggle on. At ninety, these have been reduced to a handful of thirty trembling patriarchs. Year after year they fall in diminishing numbers. One lingers perhaps, a lonely marvel, till the century is over. We look again, and the work of death is finished."

That is a statement nearer to the actual truth of things. The chances are against us. It is much more probable that we shall not, than that we shall, reach the psalmist's limit for life, of threescore years and ten.

This also is very real. Compared with his space of life, a year might seem a very small matter to Methusaleh, or even to Abraham; but compared with our space, it is certainly a very great matter. It is a very large reef furled in the sail of life; and that is the apostle's figure when he wrote to the Corinthians : "Brethren, the time is short"—more literally, "Brethren, the time is reefed." A thirsty fly once perched upon a poet's cup, and thus he sung to it :

Both alike are mine and thine,
Hastening quick to their decline :
Thine's a summer, mine no more,
Though repeated to threescore ;
Threescore summers, when they're gone,
Will appear as short as one.

"Oh, eloquent, just, and mighty death!" exclaims Sir Walter Raleigh, "whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; and whom all the

world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised. Thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *hic jacet*"—here it lies.

But that the End is sure to come, and that it is sure to come quickly to us, is not the greatest matter. This rather is the immensely greatest matter, with what sort of a life shall that End find us? All of us must die at last, like Abraham. Would God we could all of us meet the End, having lived like Abraham. And that is possible.

Consider a moment Abraham's place in history. "The homage of numberless generations has elevated the Hebrew exile of Ur almost into a divinity." To be but in lineal descent from him has been the chosen pride of a select people for four thousand years. To be in Abraham's bosom became the synonym for Paradise; and the devout Jew could not tell in better words the glories of the future state. Paul laid chief stress on faith; James laid much stress on works. Some have said they were in opposition;

yet both hold up Abraham as a shining pattern for the early Christians. If you ask the Mussulman whom he honors most, he will say to you that next to Mohammed, Abraham was God's greatest prophet. Dean Stanley will tell you that when the Roman Emperor, Alexander Severus, would place in the chapel of his palace the statues of the choice spirits of all time, that, looking on them, he might be quickened and inspired, it was Abraham's statue, rather than that of Moses, he lifted there. The truth is that no human scepter has ever been so powerful over the hearts of men as has been the spell which this Hebrew pilgrim flung. Through all the ages, no higher place in history has been reached by any man than by this Abraham.

And what I would have you specially notice is, that Abraham has reached his place in other than the usual ways in which great characters have won their greatness.

Abraham was the leader of a historic emigration. Other men have been. You and I can not be. But it was not thus that Abraham won his greatness.

Abraham was the victorious captain of fighting followers. Other men have been. It is not probable that you or I will be. But it is not thus that Abraham won his greatness.

Abraham was a prosperous man in the way of worldly wealth. Other men have been such. It is possible that some of you may be such. But it was not thus that Abraham won his greatness.

Abraham was the distinct and chosen ancestor of nations. Other men have been. You and I will not be. But it was not thus that Abraham won his greatness.

Not thus—and I would have you particularly look at this. The way into Abraham's pre-eminence was along the way of a lifted religious character. The greatness of Abraham is a distinction in moral qualities. This is what I would like to lodge chiefly in your thought—that Abraham stands in such place because of the possession of altogether imitable qualities. For moral qualities are qualities imitable all time through and all the world over. “It was simply the purity and nobility of his personal piety that made Abraham what

he is.”* And while a man may not have genius or high birth, or stimulating surroundings, or chance and power of command, or wealth, he may have a grand and controlling personal piety. I do not say that he will thus achieve the fame of Abraham—that generation will speak his name to succeeding generation, and that men will not willingly let the sound of it die away—that is a slight thing. I do say that it is possible for any man to achieve such sort of life as Abraham’s—and so certainly in the vision of God, and probably in the thought of many whom such a kind of life can not have failed to bless—come to a glorious ending at the last. This is possible. The qualities that made Abraham great are imitable, because they are moral. This is the singular characteristic of that conspicuous life, that it stands on a pedestal of goodness. And so, while we gather round the death of Abraham, it ought not to be our main and sorrowful thought, that, as Abraham died, so

* “Abraham the Friend of God,” by Oswald Dykes, pages 319, 320.

must we die too, and, most probably, in much less than half his time; our chief thought and question should be this rather, in view of that End we are so sure and so soon to reach, Are we living such a life as Abraham's, and thus getting grandly ready for the End?

Let us look, then, together now at some of these imitable moral qualities which go toward the making of a true life, and yet woven into the crown of a glorious End.

Consider Abraham's devotion to Duty.

Man is a being set in relations. No man is independent. No man is a simple unit flung into life unbound to any other units. When the ivy climbs up ruins, and binds lovingly the falling stones together, and swathes them with verdure, it clammers and winds about and helps and beautifies because of the feelers it thrusts out, laying hold by them of the crumbling stones. It is the nature of the ivy to force these feelers out. So forth from every man there are shooting feelers of relations. They are a part of his life-endowment. They come with life.

Man is bound into relation with God. Man

comes forth from God. He finds himself here in this wonderful existence the result of a distinct thought and volition on the part of God. Into that dark unknown preceding his conscious being, there is but one word which can flash the light of explanation and efficiency, and that word is—God. God is Creator, and therefore man must stand to God in the relation of the created one, or creature. But God is more than Creator. God is Father and Providence and Sustainer and King and Judge. And so again, man must stand to God in the relation of son and dependent and subject, and of a being amenable to the Divine Justice.

But, sharing life with a man, there are multitudes of other beings. Neither can man stand in any way disassociated from these. With these, innumerable relations bind him together. Men and women are to each other in the relation of father and mother and child, and husband and wife, and sister and brother, and relative and friend, and buyer and seller, and employer and employé, and fellow-townsman and fellow-citizen, and so on and on endlessly. Into less or more of these relations every man

is thrust. He can not help himself. He throws these relations out toward others, and others throw them out toward him, and thus men are intertwined with each other inextricably and irrevocably.

Now, springing out of these relations, in which we thus stand toward God and toward each other, there are forced upon us certain Duties from the sacred obligations of which we can not free ourselves. What is a Duty? Why, it is something due from me to God, to myself, to somebody else. It is something which I owe, and therefore it is something which I ought. If I am standing in such relation toward God as I have indicated, I must owe God the Duties springing out of such relations—the Duty of filialness, gratitude, loyalty, obedience. If I am standing toward men in such relation as I have indicated, I must feel toward men the moral pressure of the Duties appropriate to such relations—the Duty of justice and helpfulness and obedience where I should obey, and love where I ought to love.

These are very fundamental statements. The eye was made for the light, and responds

instinctively to its touch in vision. The human soul was made for Duty, for fitness with its real relations, and responds instinctively to their presence in the consciousness of obligation.

What, then, must be the true life—the truest—the life which may go on fearlessly to its ending, as the day passes to the glories of the sunset? Must it not be the life which is quick in its response to Duty? which gathers its energies and marshals its powers under the Banner of the Ought? “There is in life something better than ease and comfort, more delightful than pleasure, more golden than gold”; and when I quote these words from a great writer, you can not help the feeling of their truth; and you know well what that something is: it is the recognition of Duty and Submission to it.

What signal devotion to Duty appears now in the life of Abraham. Not always, and perfectly, I know, but preponderatingly, and as the more constant rule. How that call of God came crashing into his usual life. How it tore it from its former rooting places of seventy-five long years. How it snapped the tenacious ties

of family relationship. How it made him an exile from his birthplace. How it demanded that he turn his back utterly upon the known, and turn his face utterly toward the unknown, glimmering amid whose shifting mists there was only this slight beacon—"Unto a land that I shall show thee."

It was a stern and saddening face which Abraham's Duty wore; but recognizing it as the face of Duty, he would go whither her finger pointed.

Or, take that steady climbing of the Mount of Sacrifice. The Laughter of his heart, the stay of his old age, the fresh life budded upon the stem of his withered branch, the reward of faith, the actualization of the promises, the star which made the future bright; his own son to be the victim, and to be smitten by his own hand—and yet was not this the syllable formed upon the lips of Duty, that he should yield just this and do just this? It was enough. The heart of Abraham might bleed. But his hands should not falter. He would carry fire and knife. He would build the altar. He would lay the wood upon it, and bind and lay on that

even his best beloved, and grasp the knife to consummate the sacrifice. It was enough that above all there sounded the terrible yet certain tones of Duty. Abraham would not rebel. He would obey.

Or, turning from Duty rendered Godward, behold it rendered manward, too. Take but this single instance. How Lot had injured him; how greedy had been his selfish grasping; what slight regard toward priority of age, or of relationship, or of position he had shown; how careless had he been that his uncle Abraham should have for pasture only the rugged mountain heights, while he clutched all the fertile plain. Yet, when Lot was captured and carried off a prisoner, how quickly was the Duty of assistance which Abraham owed him even, replied to. How cleanly Abraham put away from himself the mean excuse, which we are so apt to make, that, because Lot had so manifestly failed in his Duty toward him, therefore he was quit of the Duty he owed his relative. How did the fact of his Duty here steer Abraham into personal risk and military valor. It was enough that

Duty called. She was highest; all else was lower.

Was not all this as it ought to be? Was not all this the resolute adjustment of one's self to one's true relations? Does not the sunshine of a quite celestial nobleness gild such a life as this? Is it not true that there was for Abraham something better than ease and comfort—more delightful than pleasure, more golden than gold?

And is it not true that what was thus so magisterial in the life of Abraham ought to be sovereign in your life and mine as well? And is not this true also, that it can be—that such moral quality is something imitable? And that as Abraham could not reach a shining End without it, so neither can you, nor I, nor any other person. Oh, let that prayer with which Wordsworth's great ode to Duty closes be our prayer also. It is not possible that we live any true life, and so come to any blissful ending, except it be our prayer.

“ To humbler functions, awful Power,
I call Thee ; I myself commend

Unto Thy guidance from this hour ;
Oh, let my weakness have an end !
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice ;
The confidence of wisdom give,
And in the light of truth Thy Bondman
let me live."

Will you now take another point of view and look at Abraham's carriage of himself self-ward? Will you notice the Integrity of the man? Take here but a single instance—you remember how it was. There was Sodom gleaming with its white walls amid the verdure. It was a place most beautiful; it was a place most wealthy; but it was a place most sinful. Everything within it had gathered to itself the taint of sin. The four kings from the North and East come down and smite it; and after the vanquishing battle, carry off with them many of its inhabitants as captives and its property as booty. Abraham organizes his military expedition, and by skillful surprise recaptures all, and brings back safely all. And the king of Sodom, thinking that surely Abraham will demand some high reward, anticipates

the supposed demand, and says, "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." Abraham receives the proposition almost as an affront. He will have nothing to do with that upon which sin has so manifestly cast its stain. He will enter into no partnership with evil. He will be enriched by no gain reaching him through crooked channels. He will be poorer for the sake of a righteousness unflawed. It is with a kingly port this man despairs such temptation. "I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."* No guilty partnerships for him. No mean and mercenary tricks of trade; no dodging sleights of hand, plucking gain out of wrong methods; or, to put it into the speech of our own day, no renting of his property for liquor-selling or for other evil doings, because rent for such purposes is higher and steadier, and the man owns

* Gen. xiv. 22, 23.

a most convenient corner; no convenient misrepresentations by his clerks while the proprietor sits back in his office with what he calls clean lips; but rather an integrity as hard against such things, as is the surface of some granite Egyptian obelisk, whose faintest sculpturings the tempests of three thousand years have not even dimmed.

But such things are in the Bible, men say, and must stay there. They will not do for Wall Street and Broadway. And so men speak on and go on, getting their measures from standards simply worldly, and excusing themselves because they are no worse than their neighbors. And yet every time they speak thus and do thus they are absolutely sure they are false to their better natures—to the immutable standard of the Right.

“What is a man,
If the chief use and market of his time
Is but to sleep and feed—a beast no more.”

But a man can not get out of himself the deathless feeling that he is more than that, and that the chief use and market of his time is that he may lift and keep lifted a steady shaft

of stern integrity ; that he ought to do it ; that such quality in Abraham is a quality imitable, and that the radiance of a noble ending can rest only upon such a life.

But there is another and a last thing that must be said : Devotion to Duty Godward and Manward ; Integrity of the self—such things as these can not stand on nothing. They must have soil firm and fertile out of which to grow. Resolution, simply, can not cause and nurture them. Any human will, by itself only, is weak, swaying, failing amid the buffetings of life.

Abraham was thus devoted to his Duty and unbroken in Integrity and illustrative of many other noblest qualities, because, first of all, and undermost, he got grasp on God by Faith. Faith lifted him into the presence and vision of God, and Faith held him there. And there, in that absolute commitment of himself to God, and in that unrelaxing grip upon God's promises—like Milton's Una in the wilderness so caught up into purity that no impurity could distract her thought and every evil and damaging thing fell away abashed—so for Abraham, meaner matters could not entice, and lower

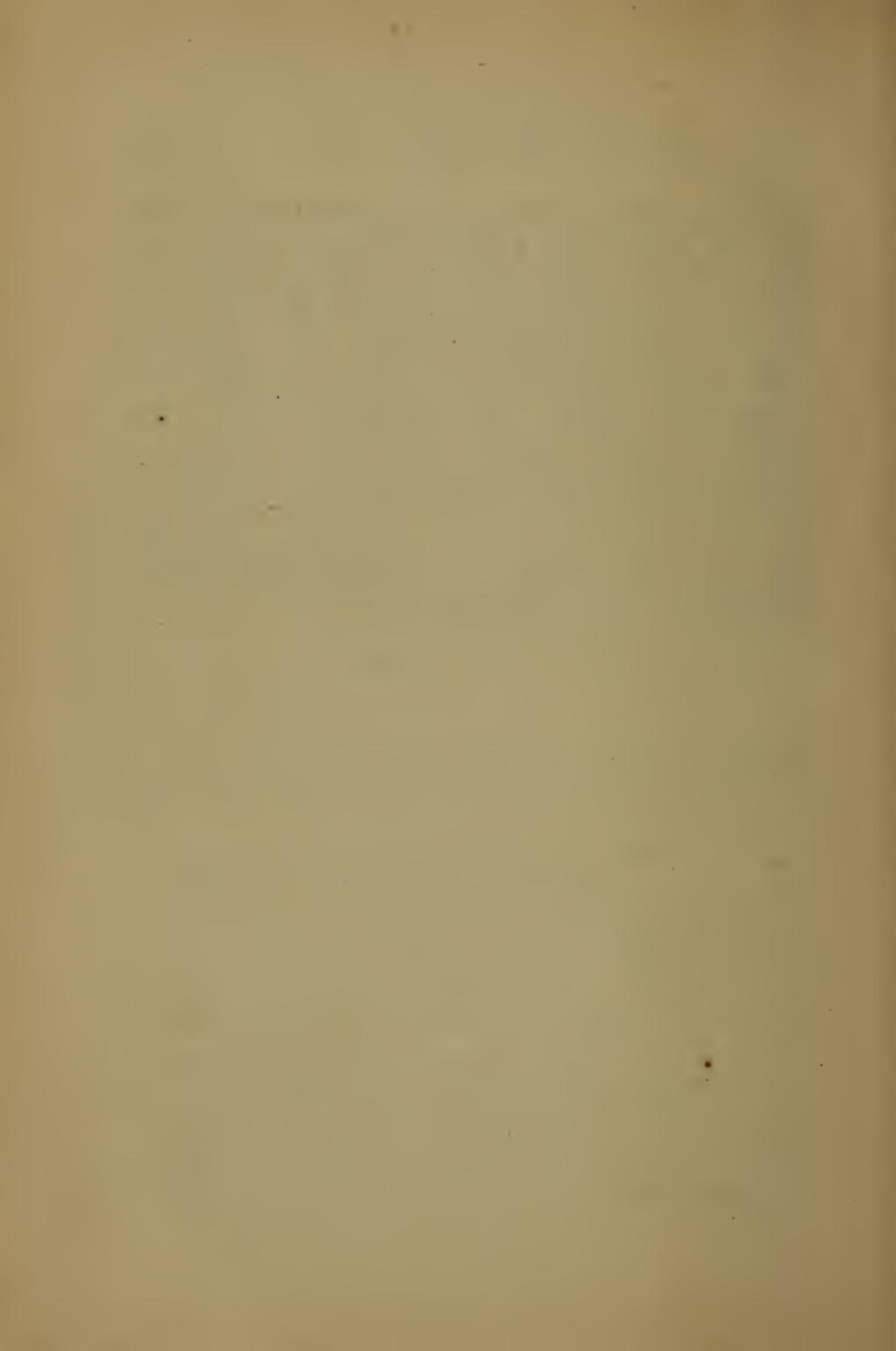
ways of life could not get at him with their solicitations. Faith filled his life with God, and so God held him and God kept him. And this quality of Faith is imitable as well. Do you want it? would you build your life upon it? would you have the right made easy through it? Then as Abraham did, with consecration unreserved, give yourself to God and you shall have it.

The time is passing. To the End we must all come. That End shall be base or noble, as the life has lent itself to baseness or been married to nobility.

This is the question ; not, when shall I meet the End ? but, how shall I meet the End ?

“ Have we not all, amid life’s petty strife,
Some high ideal of a noble life
That once seemed possible ? Did we not hear
The flutter of its wings and feel it near ?
And just within our reach it was ; and yet
We lost it in this daily jar and fret,
And now live idly in a vain regret.
And still our place is kept, and it will wait
Ready for us to fill it soon or late.
No star is ever lost we once have seen—
We always may be what we might have been.”

True, true, Christ can lift us even to our ideal if we will have it so. He can make even our lives beautiful and our endings glorious. Now, while the day lasts, now is the accepted time. But let us beware, while the years hasten and the shadows thickly fall, lest the End come suddenly and we wake into eternity to find ourselves even beyond the help of Christ—to find it all for us too late, too late. “So then they that be of Faith are blessed with faithful Abraham”—but only they.



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